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A DWELLER
IN TENTS



L. T. MEADE.



IN TENTS.



A DWELLER IN TENTS





"The Home Farm."

A DWELLER IN TENTS

BY

L. T. MEADE

AUTHOR OF "WATER GIPSIES," "ANDREW HARVEY'S WIFE,"
ETC., ETC.

"Ah, love, let us be true
To one another!" . . .

MATTHEW ARNOLD



"Eliza Jane, carrying the baby, entered."—Page 80.

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A DWELLER IN TENTS.

CHAPTER I.

DOUGLAS.

IT was a common scene enough, but not the less for that reason a pretty one. Beauty is cheap, thank God, in this world, and to be found everywhere, if one but knows where to look for it; so the common every-day sight would have been pleasing to an artistic eye had any such been there to behold it. Thank God, again, there are souls full of artistic perceptions, even with untrained eyes; and the effect on some on-lookers was sufficiently gratifying to cause them to turn away with contented smiles.

The pair who did this were old, and had gone through life encountering both its storms and sunshine together. They were quite sure that the younger pair whom they watched without appearing to watch them were about to do likewise—were about to join hands, and so fight the battle of life in double armour, as the old couple felt that they ought.

“It will be a right good thing for our Janet,”

said the old housemother ; " I 'm pleased, aint you, Dan'l ? This is better than London—eh ! "

" This is nothing, wife, but a little talk between a man and a maid. Don't you put fancies into our Janet's head."

With that the husband pinched and patted his wife's arm, and they went slowly down a walk lined with acacia trees and so into the rambling old farmhouse where they lived.

The young couple they had spoken about had neither witnessed their arrival nor their departure. They were too much absorbed with one another, and saw not the green of the grass under their feet, nor heard the merry song of numberless birds overhead, nor felt the sweet fresh summer breeze, which nevertheless played its part in the perfection of the hour.

This seemed to be the crucial moment of their fate : no wonder they were absorbed by it.

The girl, who was looking up half shyly at her companion, had a remarkable face, not pretty, but full of power. I should rather say full of powerful capacities, for on her smooth broad brow, and in her deep-set dark eyes, there was very little story written as yet. She had a tall figure, hands white, large, and capable. Her whole face and figure, the very way she clasped and unclasped her finely made fingers, showed suppressed, nervous energy. But just then, her eyes full of expectation, her soft lips trembling with unuttered joy, she looked all womanliness and beauty ; and the hardness which was in Janet Fairleigh's character was nowhere apparent. She was a young girl of twenty. Her

companion was a little past thirty, but he looked as though many more years had passed over his head. Unlike the girl, the story of a lifetime seemed to be written on his rugged features. His hair was mixed with gray; he had even acquired a slight stoop. But perhaps all the more because of the furrowed brow and lines of care discernible everywhere, his was a face to command respect even at the first glance.

"I have told you all now, Mr. Malcombe," said Janet Fairleigh, when the silence had remained too long unbroken.

"Yes, you have told me all. Thank you for your confidence. I see what your motives are. They are—yes—praiseworthy."

"I am glad you like my plan," said Janet, feebly.

"I don't like your plan—not for you. You may—you can do differently. Will you walk down the lane with me, and I will explain what I mean?"

Janet smiled, blushed a little, and turned with her companion down a lovely English lane, full now of all its early June beauty. She pulled a great wreath of honeysuckle from the hedge, and began twisting it round her fingers.

"Please say why you object to my plan," she said, half shyly, half impatiently.

"I don't object to your plan for every girl, Janet. I hate what is so-called woman's rights, carried to its extreme. But I like to see women capable and willing to work, and able to protect, yes, and to support themselves. I also agree with you, that energy without an outlet, energy thrown back on itself, must have a pernicious effect. You say that

your father and mother do not want you at home, that you have nothing particular to do at home. You also say, and wisely, that all women cannot marry—that it is wrong to make marriage the one goal, where so many must not win. You want to go to London to seek your fortune. You believe in your own talent.”

“Oh! do not think me vain,” said Janet.

“By no means; self-reliance is a virtue when not pushed to its extreme. Nevertheless, Janet, I do not approve of your plan, not for you. You say marriage does not come to all. When it does come—when it comes accompanied with love—there is no lot so blessed for a woman. My grandmother was happily married, and my grandmother used to say that the very noblest unmarried woman had but found half her life. To be a man’s best helpmeet, to bring up his children in the fear of God—can any ambition be so high, any life so holy?”

“No,” said Janet, almost under her breath, her eyes suddenly full of tears. “No; there can be no life like that.”

“You think so—thank God! Then I”—

There was a turn in the lane just then, and as these last words were passing Malcombe’s lips, the postman came quickly round this sharp corner. An almost empty letter-bag was slung over his shoulder. The bearer of joy and sorrow, of life and death, and all the varied ills and pleasures which Her Majesty’s mail can bring, came full upon these lovers, singing gaily.

“Ah! Mr. Malcombe,” he said, stopping short on seeing him and Janet, “I have only one letter left,

sir, and that's for you. May I give it you now, it will save me a jaunt?"

"Do so," said Malcombe. He took the letter, which was directed in a round and very unformed hand.

"I will read this," he said to Janet.

She turned aside while he did so, partly to gather some beauties from a great clump of wild violets, partly to hide her happy, blushing face.

"Janet," said her companion. There was a total change in his voice. Janet turned quickly and in alarm. Malcombe's face was white; he looked like a man who had got a blow.

"I cannot make that other proposal, Janet. I—forgive me—I cannot direct your future. I had forgotten—there is Douglas."

"Douglas," she said, in a tone of astonishment, pain, inquiry. "Who is Douglas?"

"Some time I will tell you; not just now. Let us go home!"





CHAPTER II.

WHO IS DOUGLAS ?

THE two walked back under the sweet summer sky in absolute silence. Janet was struggling to suppress many and varied emotions. Malcombe had put a mask over his face; as he walked by his young companion's side it looked almost expressionless.

They entered the house, and were greeted by Mrs. Fairleigh with grave lips but smiling eyes. Janet, reading only too plainly the meaning in her mother's look, ran up to her own room for a moment's respite. Malcombe approached his hostess.

"I must leave you very suddenly, Mrs. Fairleigh."

"Eh! what's that for?" exclaimed the good housemother. Then a ghastly fear rushed through her mind that Janet had refused this worthy man. "That's sudden," she repeated; "is anything wrong, Mr. Malcombe?"

"Yes, Mrs. Fairleigh, there is something wrong, but it has nothing to say to you or yours."

"Oh!" with a relieved face, "but you'll stay for a day or two more any way. You won't leave us all in a moment."

"I'm afraid it must be all in a moment. I must catch the up-train to town to-night. It is an imperative call of duty. I will write and explain in a day or two."

"Then I'll get the supper," said poor Mrs. Fairleigh in a blank voice; and because she felt aggrieved, she scarcely knew why, she called to Janet in sharp tones to help her.

The supper was eaten in almost silence, the farm gig was brought round, and Malcombe, shaking hands with all three, went away. He said nothing about coming back or seeing any of them again, but as he took Janet's limp, cold hand in his, he whispered, "I will write."

Mrs. Fairleigh overheard these words, and some hope revived in her breast. She went away to consult over the whole thing with her husband, leaving Janet alone.

Janet had many duties to perform in this primeval farmhouse; she went through these duties calmly to-night. She visited the dairy and gave directions about to-morrow's churning; she spoke to the kitchen-maid concerning some trifling omissions of duty; then she took up a book—Janet never indulged in needlework—and went close to the lattice-window to catch what was left of the waning light. Her father and mother came in; she lit the reading lamp, drew the curtains, and placed the old man's slippers by his favourite chair; then drawing her own chair close to the table, she resumed her interrupted book. Her face was perfectly pale and calm, but had any one watched her closely, they would have observed that she scarcely turned a page; also, that the eyes

fixed upon the print were blank, seeing nothing. When the clock struck ten she rose, put her book away, bade her parents a grave good night, and went upstairs. She locked her door, knelt down by the open window, and gazed out into the night.

“Thank God,” she exclaimed, with a great gasp and strained sob; “until six o’clock to-morrow morning I can look as I feel.”

Poor Janet! the thought which put that expression into her dark eyes could scarcely have been either good or happy.

The fact was she had just tasted ecstasy, and at the moment when she was about to take one deep draught, the cup had been dashed from her lips. The rapid change had partly stunned her. Her most active present feeling was the desire to hide all emotion from her father and mother. The look of pleased expectation on her mother’s face, when she and Malcombe had returned home, had been her keenest agony as yet. Like many another actor she was overdoing her part, and so revealing what she wished to conceal; but of this fact she was not aware. And as her parents stood in much too great awe of her to question her, she was not likely to learn from them that they guessed her secret. In truth, Janet stood to this homely father and mother much in the character of the ugly duckling to its parent bird. They had a kind of prevision that this gray-feathered and uncouth creature might turn out a swan on their hands, and accordingly they felt pride in her; and she being their child, and they the most affectionate old pair in the world,



"She had just tasted ecstasy."

loved her deeply, but their love was largely tempered with fear. In truth, this girl and these parents were strangely unlike. She was their only child, and from her earliest years she had been to them a sore puzzle. She inherited none of their tastes; she was clever, wilful, reserved in the extreme. As a baby and a little child she was yellow, solemn, and ugly, not the least like her pleasant fresh-coloured mother or her handsome father. They were homely people, rather despising book-lore, and considering life a very nice and happy thing without it. Janet almost taught herself to read, and even when a tiny child would sit half the day lost in some old magazine she had poked out for herself from a dusty attic upstairs. It was on one of these occasions that a clever neighbour—long since dead—had christened her “the ugly duckling,” and ventured to prophesy something great for her future. The solemn little girl heard the words, and her ambition was fired. The mother looked aghast and shook her head. “Were not clever people very unhappy, and great bores to all their friends?” But the father was pleased, and said the little lass should go to school, and so have fair play. For the first time in her life Janet, on hearing these words, got up of her own accord and gave her father a hearty hug. She was sent to a good school, and obtained what was called a liberal education. The time was just beginning when Huxley and other wise men were effecting through their earnest words a revolution in school-teaching. When Janet at twelve years old first went to school, the faint dawns of this change were beginning to be felt; and as the years

went on, she and others reaped the benefit of the great change. But in any case Janet Fairleigh would not have allowed herself to receive a commonplace education. In this she would have shown the extraordinary strength and peculiarity of her character. The things she had no special taste for nothing would induce her to learn. Her mother partly reconciled herself to what she called this school folly by the thought of the pretty tunes her girl would play by-and-by; but Janet had no musical ear, had, indeed, what was a graver defect, no musical heart; and she would not, as she expressed it, waste time over the piano. In this resolve she was doubtless right, as the things that true music teaches would to Janet Fairleigh ever have been silent. But both father and mother were disappointed. She became, however, a good linguist. She could sketch well, understood botany, though she saw no beauty in the flowers themselves; had learned the laws of health, and a smattering of one or two other sciences; finally, had passed the Cambridge Examinations with credit, and, armed with diplomas, had returned home at the age of twenty.

In this old-fashioned farmhouse, at this age, Janet was indeed more "the ugly duckling" than ever. The father and mother found that they had not one feeling or taste in common with their clever daughter. Was Janet indeed turning out a swan on their hands? They tried to believe this, and endeavoured to make their pride in her supplant their fear. Janet was no longer yellow and uncouth-looking; she was a fine girl, and some of

the neighbours even called her handsome. "She's a right clever one," said the old father, "and she's not going away any more. She'll soon improve now, wife, and learn to be a comfort and help to you."

But the wife and mother shook her head. Janet, with all her learning, knew nothing of farm-work. She doubted whether, even if she volunteered her aid, she would not prove herself more a hindrance than a help.

The first three months after her leave-taking of school and school interests must have proved themselves dull to the active girl. But she was too sensible to idle her time. Not a moment of her day did she leave unemployed, and as the days grew longer—for she left school at Christmas—she began to collect botanical specimens; she made a little laboratory for herself, and dabbled in small chemical experiments; all the evening she read hard. To her parents she was truly a sealed book.

One day the old father approached her with almost trembling. "Don't you think, Janey, you might give your mother a little help in managing the dairy; she's getting an old body now, and to superintend the butter-making and cheese-making from the milk of nigh upon forty cows is hard work for her, my lass."

"Certainly, father," said Janet, raising her eyes mildly from her book. "I don't know anything about dairies, but I can learn." That very day she wrote for a book she had heard of on the new and scientific management of a dairy, and in a

different order, however, was at hand—one she little dreamt of. Occasionally during the spring and summer months visitors from London and elsewhere used to come to stay at pretty Home Farm, in lovely Warwickshire. They were called visitors, though they paid a trifling sum for their actual expenses. Mrs. Fairleigh had the very perfection of a country bedroom for these tired Londoners. French windows with lattice patterns, homespun linen sheets, old oak furniture black with age, highly polished floors, and everything fragrant with lavender from within, where it lay sewn up in little silk bags amongst all the house linen, and fresher fragrance coming from without, from roses, and jasmine, and all the other thousand sweet summer smells.

The first visitor had been a friend of Mr. Fairleigh's, and he, charmed with the place and with all the rural sights which surrounded him, had spoken of it to an acquaintance, who in his turn mentioned it again, until it came to pass that never a summer went by without some man—they were always men—occupying Mrs. Fairleigh's best bedroom. These semi-guests, for in truth the pay was almost nominal, used to share the family meals, but seldom had any other intimacy with the family, it being quite reward enough for good Mrs. Fairleigh to see light coming back into eyes worn with study, sometimes with care and even want, or to watch the colour returning into the pale cheeks of some bonnie laddie, doubtless, she said to herself, "a mother's darling."

The year after Janet's return from school brought

with it an unusually early spring, and by the end of April the Home Farm was in all its beauty.

Earlier than usual a visitor arrived, introduced by a young fellow who had made the Home Farm his summer quarters for several summers.

"He's not much to look at," was the outspoken comment of Mr. and Mrs. Fairleigh on the night of Malcombe's arrival. Janet, however, thought differently. She had never been at home before during the stay of her parents' summer visitors, and she heard of the arrival of this one with more a sensation of annoyance than anything else. On the first night, however, though she scarcely exchanged a word with him, she altered her mind. She discovered, by a sentence dropped here, an expression there, that the stranger, who was to take up his abode at Home Farm for several weeks, was a scholar. This was quite enough for the girl, enthusiastic then about learning, and believing that in the learning obtained from books she could alone find true happiness. She resolved to cultivate the acquaintance of the stranger, hoping that he could help her in her favourite study, botany; for she was in the stage just then which sorely needed the help of a more enlightened mind. Having made her resolve, she went to work boldly. She had not a trace of the flirt in her composition, and knew of none of the pretty ways which another young girl would have used to attract Malcombe's attention. Needing his help she asked it simply and boldly. "Do you understand botany?" she asked of him, as he ate his dinner in the Home Farm kitchen.

For the first time he turned his eyes with a trace of interest to her face.

"It happens to be my favourite pursuit, or rather my recreation ; but why do you ask?"

"Because I hoped you would care for it," answered Janet ; "and I want your help."

"Then you also understand it?"

"Up to a certain point, yes ; but I am rather puzzled about the arrangement of some specimens. May I show them to you?"

"Eh! Janey, you're too free!" exclaimed the mother, rather aghast at what she considered a liberty on the part of her daughter. "Don't you be troubled with her, Mr. Malcombe."

"I shall have much pleasure in assisting Miss Fairleigh, if I can," replied Malcombe. But he, too, thought the outspoken request of this young farmhouse maiden a trifle bold. When he saw her collection, however, and talked to her, he changed his mind. In the cause of nature he was an enthusiast, and Janet had caught enough also of this fire to rouse his interest. He was astonished at her knowledge, and he pronounced her, after their first interview, both uncommon and talented.

Malcombe had scarcely ever been in the society of women—had never been intimate with a young girl before. All the more for this reason his acquaintance with Janet Fairleigh progressed rapidly. They quickly discovered that they had more tastes than botany in common. They liked the same prose authors, they worshipped the same poets. Malcombe was a geologist—Janet had long sighed to become acquainted with this fascinating study.

She had no idea that she also wanted to become better acquainted with Malcombe; that for the *first time—yes, the first time in all her life*—her soul was awakening within her, and her heart beginning to speak. She said nothing more to her parents about going to London, and Malcombe continued his stay at the Home Farm indefinitely. He, too, only believed that he found in Janet an intelligent and pleasant companion; but pleasant days were hard to find, so why not enjoy them? Why hasten back a moment before he needed to the dry routine of his daily work?

The two took long walks together. This was natural, for botanists and geologists must collect specimens, and the country was rich, at least in all vegetable products. How they laughed and argued and bantered each other, the girl becoming in those happy careless days as young as the man; for Janet before the arrival of Malcombe had really not a trace of true youth about her. Her happiness, all the greater because unconscious, and her newly acquired youth, improved her. Her eyes grew softer and brighter, and over her face settled that subtle charm which an innocent first love will always give to a girl.

The old parents were more than ever sure that their ugly duckling was turning into a swan. Not into any prodigy of learning, which they would have regarded as a misfortune, but into a graceful and happy woman—happy, because beloved.

Whoever else was blind to the true state of affairs they were not. Mrs. Fairleigh began to arrange and collect with fresh pride and interest Janet's

wedding linen, and even consulted her husband on how large a sum they would bestow on her to buy her wedding outfit. That dreadful London plan would be given up; so thought the old couple, and their Janet would marry just like any other woman. True they knew nothing whatever of Malcombe's history, nothing of his antecedents; but the shrewd old couple liked and trusted the man, and that was enough.

That Malcombe was in reality some two or three shades higher up in the social scale than Janet had also never entered into their calculations. They were too innocent, too unsophisticated to know anything of worldly distinctions. He appeared to be a good man—nay more, he was a good man—and Janet was a good woman. They loved each other; then why should not they marry?

On all possible occasions the old couple talked about the wedding they believed to be so near. True these confidences were mostly Mrs. Fairleigh's, for old Fairleigh would laugh, shake his head, and call his wife a goose, and declare stoutly there was nothing in it. But in his heart of hearts he believed in it just as firmly as his wife.

"Bless their innocent hearts," Mrs. Fairleigh would say; "they both make believe 'tis only a bit of friendship they have for each other. Wait until they have to say good-bye."

Mrs. Fairleigh was right enough in this conjecture. Unconsciously Janet and Malcombe walked to the edge of that precipice which would launch them either in the happy valley of love or in the gulf of despair; and the waking took place, at least

in the heart of the man, with the knowledge that work awaited him, and that he must bring his happy visit to Home Farm to a close.

Suddenly, like a revelation, he saw what his pleasant friendship with Janet Fairleigh meant. It was no friendship; it was the first love of a powerful, passionate, and noble nature. What matter that the man had twice the heart of the woman, that his soul was ten times as large! She was surrounded by the halo his love threw about her, and to him this girl, with her ambitions, her dreams, her nervous capable organism, was perfect. During the last week of his stay at Home Farm he saw in Janet his future wife.

He resolved to ask her to marry him, and even—what he would not have dreamt of subjecting an ordinary woman to—to share his poverty; for he was a very poor man. In this latter resolve, the resolve to ask this young girl to become a poor man's wife, he showed perhaps more than in anything else the greatness of his love. He believed that he saw in Janet all the qualities necessary to meet so severe a strain; and some of this belief he must have expressed in his eyes, even before the moment came when he would allow himself to speak.

For Janet, no flirt, and ignorant of the ways of those who indulge in this harmful pastime, read by this means Malcombe's story before it trembled to his lips. Her heart leaped up in response to what she saw; sunlight seemed to flood her path. The grave quiet girl felt herself, metaphorically speaking, treading on air. For her there was happiness,

great happiness, happiness greater than any books could impart. With her heart awake at last, she saw that it could only beat fully and in tune by the side of another heart.

One lovely afternoon the two sat under the shade of a wide-spreading apple-tree together.

Suddenly Malcombe threw aside the pieces of grass and ferns they were examining, and, taking Janet's two hands in his, said, "You have told me heaps about, and out of that head of yours, and I know something of its capacities. But there is another story I want to read."

"What is that?" asked Janet, blushing and looking down.

"A little bit about your heart, Janet. The heart has, or ought to have, a large share in the affairs of human life. What dreams has it got? tell me."

"I should like to confide in you," answered Janet, softly.

"No one can do so more sure of my interest."

Then she told him what had been a vivid dream—what was now to her nothing but an emptiness, an unreality; namely, her desire to make her own path and carve her own fame in London. She told him this because she must say something, and because his manner confused her. But by so doing she put the touchstone to his love for her.

Surely this woman, so noble, so brave, so fearless to meet in the cause of virtue the storms of life—for he read no unworthy ambition in Janet's grave, steadfast eyes—was the wife of wives for him.

Agitated, longing to tell her all his heart, they walked down the pretty lane which led from Home

Farm to the highroad. Had they chosen any other path, had the postman but delayed his coming for a few moments, they would have been engaged. but—

* * * *

Hour after hour of that weary night, which followed so brilliant an afternoon, Janet sat by her window. The summer morning found her still there, unrefreshed and yet sleepless. Her face was gray, all the light had left her eyes, and the youth which had made her almost beautiful was gone.

If her mother still had hope that Malcombe might return, that even yet matters might come right, Janet had none. She knew that her lover had left her. She did not blame him, not as yet. She did not doubt his love, but most surely did she know that he had gone away and was not coming back. When at a still early hour she heard her mother and the maids stirring below, she got up from her low seat, washed her face and hands, and ran downstairs to join them, saying once softly to herself, "It is because of Douglas—who is Douglas?"





CHAPTER III.

ON GHOSTS.

“**N**O, Julius Cæsar, I have nothing to say to you to-day, nor to you, William Tell, nor to you, Washington. I’m tired of hearing you say, William Tell, how you steadied that apple, and I don’t want stories of battles, not now. I’m going to leave all you brave fellows. I want a little talk with poor Marie-Antoinette.”

The speaker was a little boy of nine years of age, who turned up a pale face to three tall apple-trees, and having addressed them in this strange fashion ran round to a flower parterre of an old-world garden. He stopped before an exquisite white lily which slightly drooped its graceful head. “She’s gone, Marie-Antoinette,” he said. “You were quite right, you always told me she could not stay long. You saw how feeble she was growing, though I could not believe it; you were quite right, you always are right. I suppose ’tis all the sorrow you went through yourself makes you see things so clearly. Well, she is gone, and I’m alone.”

A slight breeze came down the garden, and softly stirred the lily’s tall head.

“What’s that you’re saying?” asked the child,



“ The speaker was a little boy of nine years of age.”

bending close. "Oh! she's better off. Is that it? I know that; she told me that herself, but I want to learn."

The lily bent its head again.

"You will tell me, dear queen; you are so wise, you know almost everything. Why did?"—

At this moment no fanciful tone from the lily replied, but a sharp human voice said, crossly:—

"Douglas, Master Douglas, come into the house this very moment, sir."

"Oh! please, nurse," said the boy, losing his dreamy look, and turning a very distressed little childish face towards the stout old woman who rudely clutched his arm, "Oh! please, nurse, I'm so miserable in-doors; mayn't I stay out with the flowers?"

"You *are* unfeelin'," replied the woman, "a-wanting to be playing in the garden when your aunt's a-lying dead. Shame, Master Douglas, you 'ave no heart, I will say."

So saying, she began to drag him quickly towards a very gloomy looking mansion, which faced the garden.

"But I wasn't playing, indeed I wasn't. Marie-Antoinette was telling me something; that was all."

"He's fair crazed," said the nurse, opening the door of a dingy old parlour, and pushing him in. "There, sir; I'll send you yer supper after a bit."

She locked the door behind her, and Douglas, curling himself up in a large arm-chair, pressed his thin face against the window-pane. After his request had failed to draw any kind response from

his stern old nurse, he neither cried nor frowned nor uttered any complaint.

"In one hour Mary will bring me my supper," he said aloud. He always spoke aloud when by himself. "It won't be very dark for an hour."

He continued to gaze steadily into the old courtyard which faced this window. He was evidently afraid of meeting the shadows, growing longer each moment within the room.

It was the kind of room which at dusk would be sure to impress a nervous child unfavourably. This child was highly nervous, you could tell that at a glance; his dreamy eyes, tremulous lips, the very way his thin hand grasped the back of the chair on which he had climbed, all bespoke that torture to its owner, nerves highly strung. He was so pale, too, as to look almost like a bloodless creature. You could see, you who looked at him with discerning eyes, that he knew little of laughter, nothing of childish companions, nothing whatever of personal childhood. He had an old-fashioned face, an expression anxious and fretful.

After making that one remark, he remained motionless on the chair on which he had climbed. For the hour he had prescribed to himself he kept his small face pressed to the pane, gazing out at the lengthening shadows in the court-yard.

At last the long hour came to an end; the clock outside proclaimed that it had gone by. At once he got off his high chair, ran to the locked door, and listened intently. It was growing very dark now in the gloomy room in which he had been made prisoner, and the tall old-fashioned chairs, and

the spider-legged tables, were beginning to assume an expression which Douglas knew and dreaded. He had feared this hour, even when he sat in this room by his aunt's side, she knitting primly, he playing with bricks at her feet; this hour, when the chairs seemed to put on human legs and to assume human faces, when the little tables seemed to him to grow alive. He had trembled then, when he had been close to the only human creature he loved. He used to hide his pretty curly head in her apron, and beg of her to ring for lights. The moment these appeared, in the form of two tall candles in a silver branch, he would spring to his feet, clap his hands, and say, "Ah! now they're gone."

For Douglas had a firm belief in these twilight ghosts coming with the darkness, vanishing with the light. Believing in them, poor little fellow, dreading their arrival, he now listened at the locked door. Sukie, the kitchen-maid, would be the one most likely to bring his supper to-night. There would be no use in calling, for in this old parlour no one could possibly hear him. Oh! when would Sukie come. His heart beat fast and hard; he did not dare to look into the room, every nerve was strained to listen for an expected footfall. Not a sound however was audible, and when the half-hour struck, and he knew at last that he was really forgotten, he crouched down near the closed door and covered his eyes with his hands. Believing in ghosts, which he did fully, he was quite sure that they were having a fine time now in the room with him. Doubtless they were moving about

and bowing to one another, and making strange grimaces. No, he would not look at them; not for worlds would he remove his hands from his face. What he dreaded most was that as the room grew really dark they would begin to speak, and perhaps touch him. Though he had held many fancied conversations with his ghostly playmates in the garden, yet he believed that if the ghosts of the chairs and tables were to address him he would grow quite wild with terror.

"'Tis very dreadful!" sighed the poor little fellow; "'tis as bad as anything Marie-Antoinette or the little Princes in the Tower ever went through; but they were brave, and I must try to be brave too."

He said this aloud, believing that if he talked on to himself it might make the ghosts more respectful.

"I'll try to be brave!" he repeated again, though he trembled in every limb. "Perhaps the ghosts will be kind to-night; they'll know that I am very small, and my aunty's dead. The garden ghosts are always kind and beautiful. I love them; ah! why did my nurse take me away from them? I might have been in the garden now. I meant to go and talk to the little princes."

Douglas's princes were two round-faced bachelor's buttons. "I meant to visit all the sad people this evening, and then when it got really dark I might have gone back to Washington and those other brave fellows. They always put a glow through me when they tell me of their battles and their brave ways. Oh! why am I not in the garden? *I had not half done talking to Marie-Antoinette.*"

Suddenly it occurred to him that he might just for once carry his fancies in here. Just for once the sometime Queen of France might be personified by something else besides a tall white lily. He grasped at this idea, and stretching out his hand, laid hold of a soft woollen curtain which hung over a recess near the door.

In conversing with his imaginary characters Douglas had always used two distinct voices. One was his own, the other was supposed to belong to the person he was speaking with. These two voices were now, in the darkness, called into requisition, and the ghosts of the chairs and tables had no chance of getting themselves heard.

"I'm so glad you have come, Marie-Antoinette," said the child, pressing his face against the woollen curtain and kissing it for company.

"So am I," said the queen, speaking in Douglas's other voice. "What was that you wanted to say to me, when you were taken away by that rude woman in the garden?"

"Dear queen, I wanted to ask you why God let my aunty die? I had no one but my aunty, and now she's dead."

"God was thinking of your aunty when He took her away. She's much better off. God cannot always think only of you."

"I know that, queen. I don't want to be selfish, but please tell me how my dear aunty is better off? She seemed to me to do very well down here with me."

"You know nothing about it. She's in heaven now."

"Oh! please, dear Marie, if it won't make you too sad, will you tell me what happened to you when they took away your crown and then your head?"

"I did not mind it, Douglas; I got another crown."

"What kind of crown?"

"They call it a crown of glory. I am wearing it now, and no one will take it away."

"Is it very lovely, queen?"

"Yes. You could not look at it until you got to heaven, it shines so brightly."

"Oh, dear! Do you think my aunt has got such a crown?"

"I should not be a bit surprised. You would not be so selfish as to ask her to give it up and come back again to take care of you?"

"No, indeed; not for anything. Do you think I shall have such a crown some day?"

"That depends on yourself. I got it because I was faithful and true. You may get it if you are faithful and true."

"That's like my song, queen; the song my aunt used to sing so often:

*Douglas, Douglas,
Faithful and true."*

"Well, you can try to be that," said the queen.

"I will try," answered Douglas. "I'm going to see my new brother to-night. I never saw him. Must I be faithful to him, queen?"

"Yes."

"And love him?"

"Of course."

"Dear queen, dear beautiful queen, I'm so glad you have come. Are you tired of talking?"

"Yes, Douglas, I am a little."

"Will you stay with me, and let me hold your hand, then we can both go to sleep?"

"Yes."

Leaning his head against the woollen curtain, and still clasping his hand before his eyes, the little lonely child was soon fast asleep—asleep, and dreaming peacefully, for he was smiling to himself. He was awakened two hours later by the flashing of a bright light in his face, while his nurse's voice spoke to him in coaxing tones. But a sterner, deeper voice made itself more effectually heard.

"You have neglected this child shamefully. Alone in the dark, and in a locked-up room. Go and fetch him his supper. Douglas, my little man, do you know me?"

"Are you my brother David?" asked Douglas, rising to his feet, and speaking eagerly.

"Yes; I am sorry I could not get here sooner. Poor child, you must have been lonely in here by yourself?"

"Yes, David, I was at first, but not afterwards; not when Marie-Antoinette came."

A servant who was drawing curtains and lighting candles tittered audibly. David Malcombe gazed with some perplexity at his strange little brother.





CHAPTER IV.

MALCOMBE'S RETROSPECT.

MALCOMBE, aged thirty, felt some perplexity in the management of a child of nine; he knew nothing whatever of children, their little lives were a mystery to him. In thinking over this child, while travelling in haste to the remote part of Yorkshire where his home had hitherto been, Malcombe had endeavoured to recall his own young days; had tried to think how he had acted, had spoken. His memory proved itself very shadowy on this subject, and a glance at Douglas had shown him but too clearly that one child may differ far as the poles from another. It was plain that any thoughts of himself when a little boy would prove worse than useless in helping him to manage Douglas.

That first evening, as they sat together at supper and the child looked at him without shyness, now and then volunteering a subject of conversation, and keeping it up in his old-fashioned way, Malcombe was scarcely prepossessed in his favour. His idea, dim truly, but not the less there, was that the paramount virtue in a child should be *childishness*; that little fellows should be reticent

of their feelings and words before strangers ; in short, that they should fulfil the time-honoured adage taught to himself, that boys should be seen and not heard.

Douglas wished to be polite, and his politeness was disagreeable to his brother, who pronounced him odd. In this he was surely right, for Douglas was the oddest child in the world. When Malcombe retired at last to the musty chamber which had been got ready for him for the night, he set his candle on the table, drew a chair forward, and, taking out writing materials, prepared to write a letter. Before, however, he could dip his pen in the ink, some sudden emotion seemed to come over him. He dropped the pen hastily, covered his face with his large hands, and with a groan uttered the words—

“Is the sacrifice worth this heart agony?”

The story of that sacrifice, and also of the early part of Malcombe’s life, may be told in a short space.

He was the son of a man who, having a conscience, had suffered for its sake severely. This man was a Scotchman by birth, the very poor younger son of a poor and proud old family.

Douglas Malcombe had become a minister in the Scotch Church. He was a clever man, with much depth of thought and acute reasoning powers, but in his younger days he was unfortunate ; seeking the truth everywhere, he seemed to find her nowhere. He saw many errors in his own church ; he also believed in the oft-proved fallacy that a perfect church could be founded on earth ; in short,

that out of faulty materials faultless work might arise. At the time of the Disruption in the Scottish Church he determined to leave that body, thus for ever offending his own relations. He went with his wife and one son to England, where he joined the Independents, and after a time of absolute want was fortunate enough to obtain a small chapel. The man's latter days were his best; his sufferings, his uprightness of character, his rigid principles, and above all his earnest desire to seek the truth and sell her not, were bearing their fruit.

He had had a very hard life, and much restlessness had been his portion; but as he veered towards fifty, for he did not live to be much older than that, a great calm seemed to have settled over him. A large tolerance became his portion, and from seeing the truth nowhere he began to get glimpses of her noble heart everywhere. He gave up the hope of finding a perfect creed on earth, but he accepted in its place a better belief. He saw good mixed with the evil in all creeds; nay, as time went on, he began to see more of the good than the evil. He began to perceive that the Holy Catholic Church was vaster than most men supposed her to be, and had gathered into her net some members whom many men would exclude.

His preaching at this time became remarkable. Such hope dropped from his lips and shone from his eyes that those who listened became infected; became in many instances persuaded that the end is good. Many more, however, were scandalised. Their religion of hell-fire for the many was very *comforting*, bringing with it assurances of perfect

and certain bliss for the few; it also had an unction of its own, and could not well be dispensed with.

These people spoke hardly of their minister, and his declaration from the pulpit that he fully expected to find many Mahometans very close to the throne of God brought considerable disfavour, and caused the Rev. Mr. Sikes over the way to have a considerable accession to his flock. This fact, however, did not disturb Malcombe in the least. Sikes suited these people better than he did. Sikes could tell them, just then at least, what they wanted to know better than he could.

In his latter days many, however, loved the minister, and when he died many wept for him, for he died at the age of fifty-three, leaving a wife much younger than himself, and a boy. The wife mourned according to her nature, the son according to his. This grief scarcely took the bloom from the pretty face of the former, but it clouded the latter's young days. David Malcombe had inherited his father's temperament. Sensitive, passionate, truthful, was the boy; he was just the sort of boy who could best profit by the noble latter days of his father's life. He did profit by them, drinking in some principles, imbibing some broad thoughts which could never in all his life forsake him. But in some ways the boy was his father's superior. He was more masculine; his faith, in his younger days at least, was simpler, and, fortunately for himself, the bent of his talent turned to science rather than to metaphysics. On his father's dying bed David had asked him whether he would like him to prepare to enter the ministry, in the body in which that father died.

"By no means, my son," answered the dying man; "and as far as the sect goes, it is no more like the Lord Christ than any other sect; neither more like, nor less like, David. The sect has nothing to say to it; some find rest here, and for them it is well to remain. But you, my son, you may do best elsewhere. You may join another body, or no body whatever, David. It does not matter in the least, provided you are what is outside and beyond all sects and all distinctions—a Christian. Join nobody, and preach from the lip to none, my son, unless you have a call."

But David Malcombe felt no call to preach any but lay sermons, and these unconsciously; and the idea of entering any ministry never again crossed his thoughts.

After his father's death he went with his mother to London, and at the age of sixteen entered a merchant's office. He did not like this life, but neither did he complain. They were so poor, so very poor, his mother and he, that he must do something. His mother was, for her day, a good artist, and she painted fans and fancy articles, for which she obtained ready sale. Thus they managed to live together, but as people of a lower rank might live. David, however, was too healthy and vigorous-natured a boy not to be happy. His father's death had cast a gloom over him; he missed his father more each day. Still he was happy, in spite of a poor home, his uncongenial employment, and, sad to relate, his mother. Mrs. Malcombe was one of those unfortunate women, weak as water, who really seem to be sent into the world for the

purpose of proving themselves a thorn in the flesh to all those who come in contact with them. She was silly, flippant, shallow, too little in her motives to be truthful. She was sufficiently good-natured not to desire purposely to harm any one, but nevertheless she assuredly injured every individual with whom she came in contact. She was always murmuring, always discontented; she would reproach you bitterly, almost violently, one moment, the next, metaphorically speaking, fling her arms round your neck. In short, she was a creature without ballast, possessed of a certain evanescent affection, but with little if any sense. Attracted by her pretty face and her youth—for she was only seventeen when he married her—Douglas Malcombe had made her his wife. It was an unfortunate moment for him—though for her, she was given a patient, indulgent husband, who would have trained her aright could she be trained.

After years, however, of watching and struggling and hoping against hope, Malcombe saw that this training could not be effected. What she had not in her could never be got out of her, and in this world could never be put into her. True to his fundamental faith—the restoration of all things—he believed that something might and would be done with his wife by-and-by. He believed that a great deal must be done to make her a very pleasant companion; but God would know where and how to instil some of His own depth into that shallow soul, and where to awaken a love of truth in that untruthful nature. Her husband saw that he must leave her to God. After this he ceased to

expect much from her, and schooled himself to be very patient with her ways.

The son, however—unlike the father and like the father—found this a more difficult task. Now that he had no other companion but his mother, whom he never deserted in the evenings, her flip-pant talk, her constant complainings, acted so on his heart that at last they made a sore place there.

Once, when she ventured to speak in her old repining manner of her dead husband, the boy's indignation broke bounds. He forgot that she was his mother, and scolded her roundly. He told her in plain English that she had never understood and never deserved such a man. Finally, his brief passion ended in a flood of tears. To his surprise his mother came up and kissed him softly, and never again did she speak disparagingly of her dead Douglas in her son's presence; for that son himself, she liked him all the better for his plain words.

For four years the mother and son lived in all the retirement of extreme poverty together. David had no love for his work, but he gave the sort of satisfaction that a very painstaking and high principled lad would be sure to give. At the end of four years his mother married again.

She was still not quite forty, and her pretty face had lost little of its bloom. This marriage was bad for both mother and son. She had selected for her second husband a man without principle, money, or position. The poor soul had been born a lady; but her second husband could never lay claim to the title of gentleman. Her

prospects in this second marriage were certainly not brilliant. But bad for her from a temporal point of view, they were worse for her boy, for they injured him spiritually.

The news gave his whole nature a shock, wounding him in his tenderest feelings. No words could tell how he despised the man who was to be his stepfather, who was to take his dead father's place. In his agony, he almost went on his knees to his mother. He implored, he entreated. But Mrs. Malcombe was as obstinate as she was weak, and her son's words did not move her from the course she meant to pursue in the least. When David saw this, which he did very quickly, he ceased to beg and implore; he ceased outwardly also to oppose the marriage. His mother would still live in London, and asked him to come and live with her in her new home; but this he would not listen to, nor did the newly married pair urge it very strongly.

On the day of his mother's wedding he gave up the two rooms he and she had shared together, and took one smaller room in a very cheap neighbourhood for himself. The very next morning he asked the merchant in whose office he had held his small clerkship to allow him to resign this uncongenial employment. He went to his new home that evening with six pounds in his pocket, free from his hated work and free also from his mother's frivolity, but with a place in his heart which had ached so persistently that it was now growing hard.

He was just twenty at this time, and was free as

boy could be. He sat down this evening by the small deal table in his attic, and spread his six sovereigns before him. On how he spent that money, on how he now acted, would depend his future; if he took one false step now starvation would be his doom. He resolved proudly to make no such error, but to set his face steadfastly towards knowledge, which was at that time most truly the bread of life to his soul.

He put an advertisement into the *Daily News*, in which he declared himself ready and willing to teach small boys Latin and the rudiments of geometry, mathematics, &c., further stating that his terms were small. Strange to say, this very humble little advertisement was noticed and was replied to. A gentleman who lived in Bloomsbury, and who did not approve of school life, wanted to have four very riotous little boys kept in order, and thought the young man who offered himself on such low terms might meet this difficulty.

David became tutor to four little Mastertons; and these unruly little men soon gave their unfettered hearts into his keeping. He had a way with these little lads which ever wins success. He made their interests his own. The boys learned rapidly, and improved as rapidly. David saw that he had a capacity for teaching. More tuitions followed; and now, if he had so liked, he might have taught from morning to night. But he had no such desire. He kept three tuitions, devoting two hours a day to each; thus he earned enough to keep starvation at bay. The rest of his time he devoted to the dream of his soul. He paid his fees

at University College, and entered as a student. He attended night classes on every subject. The best hours of the day he had to devote to the providing himself with physical bread and butter. The mental and more sustaining element he might cram into his mornings and nights.

Thus the first year since his mother's marriage passed away. He had not forgotten his mother, deeply as she had offended him; and a month after she went away he called on her at her new address. He asked for her under her new name, and was told that no such lady was to be found there. He did not give the matter any very serious thought, concluding that she and her husband had not found these lodgings comfortable enough to remain. He made some inquiries, but the landlady could tell him nothing; and for the remainder of the year he had no tidings of his mother.

That period had, however, only just expired, when one day, coming home tired and much dispirited—for his work was just then truly uphill, and he had not one real friend to give him sympathy—he saw a letter in his mother's handwriting on the table. He tore it open, read its contents with a muttered exclamation of distress and horror, then, snatching his hat and leaving his untasted supper, he rushed out.

It was in the direction of a large hospital his quick steps hurried him. Arriving there he asked for Mrs. Maddon, his mother's present name. On describing his own relationship to her he was taken upstairs at once to the lying-in ward. There, a new-born baby in her arms, lay his mother—dying.

She was dying consciously, however, and a smile lit up her face when she saw David.

"Ah! I knew you would come," she said feebly. "I wrote that letter when I came here, and told them to post it to you if things went badly with me. I'm dying, David."

"Where's your husband, mother?" asked the young man.

"He ran away from me three months ago. I have been wandering about and starving. I would not go to you, David."

"Good God! starving! Yes, mother; what can I do for you?"

"David, your father was a good man, I see it now. I was unworthy of him. David, I want this little baby to be called Douglas, after your father. Will you see to it, and will you take care of him?" David would have done anything then; he bent his head over his mother, and said "Yes."

"When I'm dead you'll take him away with you. You're his brother, and they'll give him to you. You will promise to take him away at once, or the workhouse guardians will lay hands on him. Promise me, David; promise that you'll never give him up."

"Yes, mother, I promise; so help me God."

"Ah! you're a good lad, just like your father. Now I'll die easy; give me your hand, Davie lad, and sit by me for a bit."

David took her hand, knelt down by her side, and bending over her kissed her.

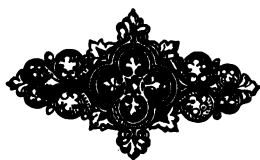
"Davie, do you think God will let me see your *father again*?"

"Poor mother, I hope so."

The dying woman smiled.

"I like to feel your hand," she said, and she moved it feebly, so as to lay her wasted cheek against it.

Two hours later she died, and David, asking the nurse to give him the baby, carried it home in a shawl which had been his father's last gift to his mother.





CHAPTER V.

HIS FRIEND.

MALCOMBE carried the new-born baby straight to his landlady, telling her enough of its forlorn history to make that worthy woman, who was a mother herself, weep.

"Lord bless us, but you're a good 'un," she said, glancing admiringly at David. She was a very rough coarse woman, but she tended the baby in the tenderest fashion.

David went upstairs, sat down before his untasted supper, and tried to realise what manner of thing had befallen him. He did not go to bed that night; early in the morning he sought the landlady.

"Here is a sovereign," he said; "buy food for the baby; I will be back in two days."

The woman had often been deceived in the course of her life, and when she heard that Malcombe was going away she glanced at him suspiciously. Did he mean to leave the baby on her hands?

"You're certain to come back," she said.

"Of course I am."

Never had lad a more honest face than David Malcombe. The landlady felt ashamed of her suspicions; she promised to tend the baby well,

and she kept her word. After two nights absence Malcombe returned. He had been successful in his mission, and had found a home for the baby. Amongst the other near relations who had quarrelled with his father, when he had left the Scottish Church and deserted his native land, was a sister, his only sister, his favourite of all his own people. Her estrangement had often been a grief to his father, and he many times expressed the wish that Tibbie would make it up with him. David determined to appeal to this offended aunt, to ask her to help him in the charge of his step-brother. He knew he was doing a very daring act, but this woman was the only female relation he had in the world. He found her in an old place which she rented for herself, in Yorkshire. Very old, dried up and withered, was the maiden who had steeled her heart against her own. David told his story in the plain unvarnished way which ever characterised him, telling the whole truth, and sparing no details.

"I don't want you to adopt the boy," added the audacious young man, in conclusion, "but I want you to take charge of him ; I will pay his expenses."

"I must have thirty pounds a year," said David's maiden aunt.

"You shall have it."

"I won't take care of him after he is ten years old."

"Thank you ; after that I can manage him."

"He must never be known as Maddon. Make his name Douglas Malcombe, at once. I won't look at a Maddon."

"I, too, hate the name of Maddon, Aunt Tibbie. He shall be known as Malcombe with all the good will in the world."

"Eh! but lad, you spoke like your father then. Send me the poor bit bairn and I'll do for him."

The next week the coarse-minded landlady took little Douglas down to Yorkshire; and but for cheques sent regularly twice a year, this little episode might never have occurred to Malcombe. The cheques, however, to so poor a man were hard to find; and to meet this heavy drain he had to take more tuitions, and consequently had less time for study. He began to despair of ever really becoming a scholar, and he often had doubts whether, with the prospect of taking care of Douglas by-and-by, he was right to turn his thoughts away from all money-making professions.

The man, however, had that in him, whether a vein of oddity or not, which prevented his caring for money for money's sake. He was very abstemious, his habits were most simple; what riches could buy had never the least attraction for him, and he could not give up the dream of his life, the desire to obtain that knowledge from whose unexplored field he might reap so rich an harvest. So he worked on month after month, year after year, unnoticed; except by his pupils, unknown. He began to grow old before his time, and those who spared leisure enough in the race after wealth to remark him, said that he was a dull fellow, devoid of all ambition; in truth, though by no means unhappy at this time, David Malcombe was not improving. His pupils cared less for him than they did,

histeaching bore less satisfactory results. The reason for this was not far to seek : the man's heart was drying up for want of any strong human interest.

When little Douglas, however, was four years old, there came a twofold change for his elder brother. The first change, though hailed by him with pleasure, was likely to be detrimental, as weakening his ties to others. Aunt Tibbie wrote to him. She had grown fond of the bit bairn ; he should stay with her as long as she lived, and at her death should inherit her little all. David need no longer send money for the boy's support, for from this date Aunt Tibbie would look upon him as her adopted son. David did not dream of refusing so advantageous an offer. He wrote to express his thankfulness, and that afternoon resigned an extra tutorship he had undertaken, and returned with a light heart to his interrupted studies. And now might the man have simply turned into a dry student, living in the past, producing no enduring work, benefiting none, and passing away at last, having left no trace of himself either for good or evil behind him. But God never wastes good workmen, and the time was drawing on apace when He would make large use of Malcombe. To prepare him for this future He sent him now, what the man had never known and never possessed before, even in his dreams—a friend. In the room next to Malcombe's lodged a consumptive young curate. He was the first clergyman who had ever come to lodge at Mrs. Brand's, and she was rather proud of him.

Malcombe was first made aware of his presence by a cough, which irritated the student, and often

when he sought his late couch prevented his sleeping. One day the clergyman knocked at his door. He was a slim, hectic young fellow, and came in rather timidly.

"Pray forgive me for intruding. I observe that the partition between your room and mine is very thin. I have a rather loud and troublesome cough. I fear it disturbs you; pray tell me so frankly, for my landlady says there is an attic upstairs which she can give me."

"My old room," said Malcombe, staring at his visitor and forgetting to ask him to sit down; "but it is very damp."

"Do not think of that; I have a waterproof sheet which I can hang round the bed."

"I beg you will not move on my account, I could not hear of it!"

"Then I don't disturb you?"

"To be frank, you do very much; but I ought to be obliged to you, as I don't waste so much time in sleep, and so have more to devote to study. Will you sit down?"

"You are a strange fellow," said the curate, forgetting both his shyness and his priesthood, and seating himself with boyish pleasure by Malcombe's good fire.

They had many tastes in common, they both loved knowledge. Long into the night they talked, and in fact neither walked, ran, but leaped into friendship. From that hour Malcombe had a human interest, and his sleeping heart awoke. The earthly side of the friendship lasted exactly a year. At the end of that time young Graham

ceased to cough, and resigned into his Maker's hands the burden of a life he had bravely borne. He was an orphan, poor young fellow, and seemed to have left no ties behind. His rector quickly got another curate, his landlady another lodger; his poor were attended in winter's cold and summer's heat by a freshly ordained clergyman; his sermons were forgotten in the interest another and more eloquent man excited; in short, the grave closed over him, and there seemed not a ripple to show where his young life had gone down, except one—he made a man of David Malcombe. Malcombe alone followed him to his grave, Malcombe attended him in his dying hour, and, as he wiped the damp of death from his brow, whispered, “Thank you, lad, for never preaching to me, but just *doing*. Aye, but you are a grand fellow! Tell my father, laddie, if you meet him up yonder, that you have saved his son. I'm God's man now, and He shall know what that means; you have saved me, Graham, boy; I'm God's workman now!”

In truth there was a great change in Malcombe. The dawns of what would altogether alter the current of his being had set in. But his was one of those natures that develop slowly, and the apparent results at first were small. When he came home after Graham's funeral, he sat for a long time without looking at the many books which always lay close at hand. But he was not thinking of either the pain or the loneliness which were his in parting with his best and only friend.

“Aye,” he said at last, raising his head and speaking in his deliberate fashion, “the God that

poor fellow believed in I believe in. Only a God could have carried him through his silent heroic life. Graham's God, too, was my father's. He sought and found Him in the thick darkness. I have never doubted Him as my father did, but I have done worse. Practically He counted for nothing in my life, most practically I have forgotten Him ; but it is not too late. What does God demand of the creature He has made? Aye, Graham knew how to answer that question. 'I delight to do Thy will, oh, my God.' That delight can be learned."

The next Sunday Malcombe went to church. He had no special intention of becoming a churchman, but this was the outward form of Graham's worship. He sat in one of the free seats, tried to imagine his dead friend in the pulpit, and endeavoured, though very lamely, to follow the service. The next Sunday he tried an Independent Chapel, the next a Baptist, the next a Wesleyan. The fifth Sunday, however, found him wending his way to no place of worship, but, taking his Bible in his pocket, he ran down stairs to Mrs. Brand's untidy sitting-room. He chatted in the most sympathising way with the tired woman for half an hour, and before he left her read aloud the story of the Samaritan Woman and the Saviour. It may be doubted whether Mrs. Brand listened very attentively, but the circumstance was so far important to Malcombe, as being his first conscious act of direct service. The next Sunday found him with the two most delicate of Mrs. Brand's children in the country, where he gathered wild flowers for them, and gave them buns and milk. The children's delight gave

him pleasure; and from that day, for many Sundays to come, he attended no place of worship, but always contrived to make some person or persons happy in and through his presence. I am afraid that such utter disregard of the appointed means of grace would have been too much for the feelings of the greater number of the vast body of Christians to whom he now in very truth belonged; and most of them would in their ignorance have let him go by on the other side. Nor do I quite blame them. For few people are wise enough to wait God's leisure. In Malcombe's case, the need for public worship had not yet come to him.

As I said, his growth towards God was very slow, but the fire was kindled which was to consume the sacrifice. Malcombe had always the gift for teaching. What he knew he could impart, and in such a fashion that the dullest intellect had at least a chance under his skilful moulding of waking up. He now taught better than ever; and, instead of rejecting tuitions, took more. His teaching was now so good, and bore such patent fruits, that had he chosen he might have made a very good income by this means. But he still asked low prices, and gave away all that he did not absolutely require.

So the years went by; and Malcombe, thinking humbly of himself, and little known, was yet growing strong—strong to meet unexpected happiness—to see that happiness crushed by what seemed like the stern call of duty—to do wrong, believing he was doing right—and yet again to rise into the fulness of a blessed life.



CHAPTER VI.

A SORE TEMPTATION.

JUST after he had completed his thirtieth birthday Malcombe went down to Home Farm, and there fell in love with Janet Fairleigh. Falling in love with him meant a great deal. It was as the flooding of a soft and gracious light over his whole being. He wondered at the new light or joy that filled him, at the rosy glow which seemed to surround him; what he experienced puzzled him. He did not recognise what he was going through as a common event, an episode in most men's lives; in him, indeed, owing to the depth of his character, it would be stronger than in most men. But so also would the waking day, which comes, alas! to most, be darker. In some things Malcombe was a very child, and of women hitherto he had known very little. Only with two women had he held much intercourse—his mother, who was silly and vain; Mrs. Brand, who was coarse and loud. He did not give women many thoughts; he felt, without putting it into so many words, that he and they could never have very much in common. His opinion of them was certainly not high, and had he been asked he would have divided them broadly into

two classes—the refined portion like his mother, the vulgar herd like Mrs. Brand.

When he went to Home Farm, and Janet asked him to assist her in the classification of her botanical specimens, with the slight annoyance which such a request gave him, came also a feeling of surprise that any woman could take an interest in so sensible a pursuit. After their first interview, in humility at his own ignorance, he divided the women of the world into three classes instead of two, and Janet reigned as queen of this third and better portion.

In short, he fell in love with her because she was as unlike both his mother and Mrs. Brand as she could possibly be. She was wise, highly educated, very quiet, and ladylike in her ways and movements. He began to think of life with new thoughts, he began to believe in the possibility of a very strong personal joy. With this woman for his daily companion, how pleasurable might the daily toil, the common task become! In short, he began to dream of a fireside and a home.

For the first time the man looked back with very keen regret at the years certainly not spent by him in building up any earthly house of cards. After all, money was a tangible good; and he had thrown away his chance of acquiring it. For what, then, had he spent thirty years? He believed that he had wasted his life; for, in his desire to make Janet his own, he counted for nothing his really vast store of knowledge, his varied and rich experiences, and the blessings of many widows and orphans, for whom he had certainly spent and been spent.

Poor Malcombe! He had never been happier than now, and never more selfish. As the days went on he became more and more convinced that he should return to London with only half his real self—that the better portion of him would remain with Janet at Home Farm. He knew only too well beforehand how his torn heart would cry; and he began to wonder was such a pain necessary, could such a pain by any effort on his part be avoided? Suppose he went back to town and raised his prices, bringing them up to the usual market value. Suppose he took more and more tuitions, and went in for that higher work which demanded higher pay. Suppose, in short, he joined in the race for wealth, and gave up the calm leisure which brought him peace and knowledge.

By so doing he might win Janet and a home; but by so doing he must give up feeding the hungry and clothing the naked; and many of his cleverest pupils must leave him, being no longer able to afford his prices. In short, he must sink into an everyday man, and cease to fulfil his promise to Graham. But this latter fact scarcely troubled him, as he had never supposed that he was fulfilling it. He thought hard, and finally resolved to act. Working with all his might and main at tuition for money he would not be rich. He would, indeed, in the ordinary acceptation of the word, be poor; but he only cared for riches even now in so far as they would give to him Janet. He wondered would she venture to become a poor man's wife? Studying her well, as he did days before he made up his mind to speak, he believed that she was *noble enough to encounter poverty for his sake.*

He had all but spoken, the two hearts had all but met in outward speech, when Douglas's childish letter was placed in Malcombe's hands. Of late years he had almost forgotten his little step-brother; so few thoughts did he give to this child, whom he had never seen since he was a week old, that he had really not remembered to mention him to Janet. He did not know why he paused in the words which he longed to utter, to read this epistle directed to him in a childish and unknown hand. Perhaps he wished the postman to be a little farther out of sight and hearing; perhaps he was influenced by a power which was directing every step of his way; at any rate, before saying another word to Janet, he broke the seal. This was what he read:—

Dear Brother David,

My aunty says you will take care of me now. My aunty is dead, and I am very lonely.

Your affectionate brother,

DOUGLAS MALCOMBE.

On a thin official-looking sheet of paper was a further inclosure:—

Dear Sir,

It is my painful duty to inform you of the death of my client, Miss Malcombe. I regret also to have to add that she has not only died without money, but with some standing debts. She had invested her money in the — Bank, which as you are aware failed last week. The sad news affected the unhappy lady so strongly that she was seized with an apoplectic attack, from which she never rallied. I believe that the furniture and other personal effects, when sold, will pay off most of the debts. But what

is to be done with the little boy? I appeal to you as his nearest of kin.

I remain, Sir, yours respectfully,

JOHN STANDISH.

To David Malcombe, Esq.

"Why did I not speak before?" this was Malcombe's first wild thought; his second came more calmly, because despairingly.

"I can ask no woman now to be my wife! Farewell to that brightness."

Then a great wish took possession of him to get away from the woman whom he loved and must not win; for just now her presence was torture to him. He could explain nothing, he must only get away; he must cease to look at Janet, or to watch the doubt and misery clouding her eyes. He told her as he took her hand in parting that he would write, but he had no idea what he would say. In truth, the fall from his paradise to his despair had half-stunned him. He took the long journey from Warwickshire to Hurst, the small town near where Miss Malcombe had lived, mechanically. He felt, as he was swiftly whirled along nearer and nearer to his destination, like a man suffering from nightmare. In truth, a heavy cloud rested over him, blotting out sun, moon, and stars from his horizon. He had, however, too much real kindness and gentleness of heart to be anything but tender to the child, who he felt had ruined his life, although he was by no means prepossessed by the dreamy little old-fashioned creature. As he sat with pen and paper before him, all things seemed to combine to make life very black. Before he went to bed he *must* write to Janet; and what could he say?

Hour after hour he sat with a blank sheet of paper before him, and hour after hour the weary conflict went on. In truth, the man was assailed by a very peculiar temptation, a temptation which might come to such a nature, which his strange bringing up and his little experience of one side of life all prepared him for, which in very truth did come to him to-night, when Satan himself sat by the side of the brave soul disguised in the form of an angel of light. For Malcombe was now thinking that right which was wrong, and that wrong which was right. Accustomed ever to deny himself, he now believed that self-denial was the only right course for him. Self-denial had been the very law of laws to him always; he must cling to it now, cling with bleeding hands, and agonised longings for the path which seemed to him wrong, and yet was right. For the more he longed for the love of a wife and the joys of a home, the more he believed that the higher life led him elsewhere, away from, not towards, these best gifts of God. Thinking of himself, afraid of the true promptings of his own heart, he quite forgot the other side of the question, namely, his duty to the woman whose affections he had won. It never occurred to him—had it done so he would have put it aside as a fresh temptation—that his first duty now was to Janet; that greater than his promise to his dying mother was the unspoken promise that yet had surely leaped from his eyes to the woman whom he wished to make his wife. But because he wished so to make her his wife, to clasp her to his very heart of hearts, he believed this joy to be denied him; he believed

that everything tended towards his remaining unmarried, that for many years, at least, he must devote himself to Douglas, and give up all hope of having a home of his own.

This he thought, and so thinking took up pen and paper and tried to write, but as he did so his hands trembled and his clouded brain refused to think coherently. Still he longed for his happiness, still he struggled hard not to give it up.

As he sat in that silent room, close to the more silent room where the dead lay next door, two wild ideas were presenting themselves to his mind. Might he not make Janet his wife, and still take care of Douglas? Might not he, who strictly speaking had no real profession, who was only a teacher in an amateur way, who had hitherto barely supported himself and never put by a pound, might he not now so slave, and toil, and grind both himself and others for money, as to be able to marry and to take the care of this delicate child as well? Why had he given up that clerkship long ago? With care and pains he might now have been deriving a good salary out of that great business; at least he would have acquired a certain position, and would be possessed of a certain income. How Quixotic and absurd had been his life! Who was he that he should have despised money and thought the aims of ordinary men too low? It was very plain that he wanted the joys of other men. Why had he wasted the very best years of his existence over a chimera, a dream? But was it too late, is it ever too late to mend? Might he not even now cease to be Don Quixote, and demand rightful

money for his labour? He would teach just as well, impart ideas just as brilliantly as before, *only* he would do it for gold. He took out a pencil and paper and began to calculate. At present he had three tuitions daily. One was at the house of a widow who had four sons; he had seen the mother very seldom, but he was attached to the boys, who were fine brave fellows, full of all kind of schemes and ambitions, and with no apparent possessions in this world except healthy vigorous bodies and plenty of brain power. He had enjoyed his two hours daily with these boys, and had never forgotten the almost start of astonishment and delight on the mother's worn face when, in their first interview, he had mentioned his terms. She had said "Thank God," under her breath, and then turned away to hide the tears which were filling her eyes.

"You teach us so jolly well," said little Jack, the youngest of these boys, "nearly as well as our father used. Mother says you *are* cheap, and that God must have sent you. She says she prayed so hard to God to show her how to educate us all, and then you came. I'm so glad you don't take more of mother's money."

Malcombe had felt very happy the day those words were said; he did not quite like to recall them to-night. His next pupil was a lame boy, who was not a gentleman by birth, but who had heaps of talent and originality; this lad paid his tutor by the trifles he made by wood-carving. The others were the sons of some very careless and poor parents, wild little fellows, who had made no progress at the cheap school where they had attended

until he took them in hand. They were now improving rapidly, and might, in spite of their parents, who could never really help them, become useful men yet. The little money he had gained by such a system of teaching had barely enabled Malcombe to live; and very frugally had he lived, for even out of these scanty earnings he had always given away to those who, as he said, could not possibly bear hunger as well. The man had been very happy in this life, but the thought of it did not make him happy to-night; he found that he longed sore for an earthly good, that in short he was human after all. Should he act according to his inclinations? should he even now write to Janet and ask her to be his wife? The longing was very sore within him, for every fibre of his strong heart seemed to have gathered round this woman, whom he thought the best and noblest of her kind.

Before that letter came from Douglas he had made a compromise with his conscience. He would give up his old practice of leisure for thought, leisure for learning, and work hard from morning to night. He would take some tuitions from rich people, who could and would only too gladly pay him well. Hitherto he had turned away from all such offers. His labours were not needed by the rich, who could do far more for their sons by sending them to public schools; and in his teaching he had delighted in the double motive of doing good as well as supporting himself. Now, however, for Janet's sake he would teach the rich, and accept the money of the rich. But though he did this he would not give up the poor; the widow's children should still

claim his services, and the lame boy should still be taught by him.

He had arranged all this in his own mind before Douglas's letter came. But now—now, if he accepted the joy he longed for—he must do differently. Now, if by any chance he could support both Janet and Douglas, he must teach only the rich. He must write to—no! he could not face that widow and tell her that his terms were more than doubled, that he could no longer afford to teach her boys at his former price. He must tell that lame lad to seek the learning he longed for at some night school; his time was too precious to devote to him any longer. Yes, in this way, perhaps, he might still have his happiness. This he regarded as his first temptation; and just because it was so unlike what any one who knew him would have expected of the man, it assailed him mightily. The other and second temptation came with regard to Douglas. Was it necessary for him to take up the burden thus so suddenly, so cruelly thrust on his hands? This boy—the son of a low marriage, the son of a disgraced father, who might be, for aught Malcombe could tell to the contrary, now in a convict's cell—because his mother had borne him, must he ruin Malcombe's life? Might he not be educated by charity? Might not he, Malcombe, be rid of this unwelcome charge? Must a promise made, too, in a moment of impulse to his dying mother be for ever binding on him?

Yes, surely here were two ways out of his difficulty. Either by living as other men lived, by resigning the work which had been his life work,

or by refusing to take the burden of the child thus so unexpectedly thrust upon him, he might win his Janet; he might, to whomever else he was false, be true at least to the woman of his choice.

When the morning broke he had come to no decision. The night of agony, however, had told on him; he looked years older, and many white hairs were added to his already iron-gray head. When the sun shone brightly into his chamber he got up, drew aside the blinds, and left his room; truly a torture chamber had it been to him. In the passage he met the old nurse, who had neglected Douglas the night before. She came to him with a curtsey.

"Perhaps Mr. Malcombe would like to see the poor dear mistress's corpse? It was a right beautiful corpse, and that she would say."

Malcombe had no ready objection to offer. He took the key of the chamber from the old woman and went in. A sheet was covering the body; he drew it off the face, looked at it almost indifferently for a moment, then turned away. He had just reached the door when he heard a scuffle in the passage. The scuffle was followed by a child's cry, and the next moment little Douglas followed by his nurse ran into the room. The moment he saw Malcombe he flew to him, and clasping his hands round his knees, began to sob out—

"Please, David! let me see my aunty. Nurse won't let me; but indeed I am not afraid."

"Leave the boy with me," said Malcombe to the old nurse. He took Douglas in his arms and turned to the bed.

"Are you sure you are not afraid?" he said, before he turned down the sheet. "A dead person does not look like a living one, do you know?"

"I know," said the child; "but indeed I am not afraid. Please let me see?"

Malcombe drew back the sheet, and for the first time saw in the face, rendered young by death, a likeness to his father.

"Poor Aunt Tibby!" he said involuntarily.

"She's not poor!" said little Douglas, "she's going to have a crown of glory—I mean she has one. Marie-Antoinette says that all people who are faithful and true get those crowns. She was that; and I'm going to try. Do you think you'll have a crown, David?" No speech in all the world could have been more terrible to David Malcombe at that moment. The innocent eyes of the child, the brave light on the child's broad brow, the very way, with faith lighting up his little, thin face, that he looked at his brother, were too much for Malcombe. He almost dropped him from his arms. He made no sort of answer to his question, but leading him from the room, told him to run into the garden. For himself, he went back to the room where he had spent the night.

Douglas's speech had been horrible to Malcombe, making him believe that in forsaking him he would indeed be faithless to all that his principles held to be right. It seemed to him that he almost saw in a vision his dead father and his dead friend, both crowned, standing by him crownless. Suddenly he fell on his knees. I don't think he uttered a word, but I know that for the first time in all his life he

wept aloud. His voiceless prayer and his tears brought to him indeed no present comfort, but they inspired him with a desperate desire to do something—and at once. He dipped his pen now determinedly in the ink and wrote rapidly. The letter he wrote to Janet Fairleigh was long, fully explanatory. He was too unsophisticated a man to think of an engagement to count in any way on money coming to help them from her father. No! telling her that he loved her, he gave her up. He said they must never think of one another. He said a temptation had come to him to try to keep both her and Douglas, to give up Douglas and to keep her. By either of these courses he would, he believed, be committing a great sin. He told her all Douglas's little story, he showed her how sacred this charge seemed to him; he begged of her to forgive him, to show her forgiveness by never letting this great trouble which had come on them both spoil her life. He reminded her of the greatness of self-sacrifice; then, suddenly breaking down, he told her that though he knew all these things to be true, he felt no comfort in them, that he was very miserable, and that the burden laid upon them both was crushing him to the very earth. It was scarcely a wise conclusion, but Malcombe, when he had finished, did not even glance at what he had written. He only knew that he had given Janet up, that he had turned back to a life from which all the zeal had departed, all the glory vanished. But having put his hand to the plough, he must not look back. Before he tasted food he put on his hat and, walking into Hurst, posted the letter.



CHAPTER VII.

A SENTIMENT AND A RESOLVE.

JANET received Malcombe's letter on the second day after he had left her. It came with the morning's post, was brought in by her old father, and laid silently on her plate. Both father and mother knew the handwriting, and glanced anxiously at each other. Janet, however, did not lose her self-control. She laid the letter unopened by her plate, and ate a little breakfast—she could not manage a great deal—in the most tranquil manner. When her mother rose she said, "I will help you in the dairy now at once, mother. It is likely to rain to-day, and we can have a good long morning in arranging the shelves for the milk-pans after my new plan."

Janet's interference in the dairy was always a sore subject with Mrs. Fairleigh. That she should be so composed as to propose to give a whole morning to some most unnecessary disturbance there, when a thick letter from her lover lay unopened by her plate, was too much for the worthy woman's equanimity. She looked at her husband, threw up her hands despairingly, and spoke.

"Eh, dear!" she said, "the ways of learned folks

is past comprehension. 'Tis long before I'd have left a letter of Dan'l's unread when he was a-court-ing me. I misdoubt me that you have no heart, Janet. No, I'll do nothing in the dairy this morning. Go and read your letter, and behave like a flesh and blood bairn, for once in your life."

Janet coloured high; her lips quivered for a moment. She made, however, no answer to her mother, but taking down her garden hat from a peg where it hung handy for use, went into the garden.

"I'm real angered, Dan'l," said the old mother. "I'm fair to think that the lass has no heart."

"Not a bit of it, wife, 'tis all put on; didn't I see the poor child's hand a-trembling when she clutched hold of the letter? She don't want to make believe, for she's a bit proud; but 'tis my fear as something has gone mighty wrong between them two."

"Well, and why don't she tell her parients," said the still indignant old mother; "but it all comes of larning, which I misdoubts more than ever."

In the meantime Janet had gone down the lane where she and Malcombe had wandered, had paused at the very violet bank where she had spent her last happy moment. Seated there she broke the seal and read the letter; at this hour there was no fear of any one coming to disturb her. She read right through to the end, turning page after page with firm fingers. When she had finished the letter she let it lie on her lap, crossed her hands over it, and looked straight before her; the look on her young face was very hard, her dark eyes

glowed with no holy fire. Whatever Janet Fairleigh might have become as the happy wife of the man she loved must remain an unspoken mystery; under this sudden temptation she fell swiftly. She was never one quarter as fine a character as Malcombe had pictured her. At this moment all that he best loved died utterly, and it was a hard and revengeful soul that looked out of her young eyes. Since he left her until this moment Janet had felt stunned, believing, and yet not believing, that she had lost him. She awoke now out of her trance, alas! to what? The letter she had read had awakened in her breast the most passionate anger. She saw nothing of the really noble heart of the writer, nothing of anything but self-pity filled her. The despair at the end of the letter chimed in best with her own heart; she read that part several times. When at last she rose to her feet, she was conscious of a very dreadful sensation and a very firm resolve. She hated Douglas, this was her sensation; come what would she would win Malcombe yet, this was her resolve. She walked swiftly back to the house. Her father and mother were still lingering in the pleasant kitchen; the old man was smoking a pipe tranquilly in the chimney corner, his wife was knitting a long stocking by his side. Two happy old faces they were, full of peace and goodwill to all men. They both greeted Janet heartily. Perhaps she was coming to confide in them at last.

"Sit down, lass," said the mother, making room for her by herself. Janet, however, preferred to stand.

"I have heard from Mr. Malcombe," she began

swiftly. "No," as her mother tried eagerly to interrupt her, "his letter is not what you think. We are not lovers, but we are good friends. Mr. Malcombe has written me a long letter. He has been left a little boy to take care of. I believe he is his half-brother. He has told me the story. It is commonplace enough. The child had an aunt, who took care of him until her death. Now he must live with Mr. Malcombe. It was to go to him Mr. Malcombe had to leave so suddenly. This is the principal news in Mr. Malcombe's letter. But," after a pause, "I have not come here to tell you that. I wish to say, father and mother, that I have made up my mind to go to London, and at once. I shall take steps to get something to do there without delay."

The old people held up their hands. The old man let his pipe drop. It was the mother who spoke.

"Don't you see as 'tis a grief to me and him? Why do you fret us by this talk?"

"I have no wish to fret you, mother. I only state a fact, that I am going."

"But we doesn't wish it. What's the use of being so masterful? A good gel stays along of her parients."

"Stay with us, Janey," said the old father, speaking for the first time, and laying his hand on her arm.

She touched the withered old hand almost softly.

"Dear father and mother," she began, "a great many girls go from home now—heaps of girls. I should not be happy doing nothing here. I told you

that before. I have been educated to do something, and I must do it. There is no use in opposing me; you don't really want me. I can't do a great deal for either of you, and I shall be no more away from you than I was while at school. Of course I shall come back sometimes."

"You'll just be a disgrace; a teacher body in London."

"Teachers are not disgraceful, mother. No one thinks so. I should be much more of a disgrace were I to do nothing here."

"Eh! but what will her aunts say?" continued the old woman. "I hoped as she'd have give it up; but she's that obstinate. 'Tis all that larning that takes the heart and everything else from a body."

"Don't be hard on her, wife," said the father. "My poor lass," he continued, "if so be yer heart is set on this, and you'll tell me true that you're not sore from any trouble, and that no one have been playing you false, why—God's will be done. You never were an ordinary lass, Janey, never."

"No one has played me false, father," answered Janet.

"Eh, dear! Your mother and I thought as you and Mr. Malcombe were sweethearting. But young folks is queer nowadays. Well, Janey, lass, you may go live in Lonnon, and try it for a spell. I misdoubts me but you'll soon weary to be home again. But you need not take up no nonsense of teaching, for your mother and me 'ull pay yer lodging and bit of vitul. Go, Janey, and be happy, lass; we don't want nought but to make you happy."

"Thank you, dear father," said Janet. "I may take a very little money with me to start with; but I must earn. I will promise not to disgrace either you or my mother. Suppose, father, you heard that I'd done something great? Why, then you'd be proud."

She was so far softened now as to kneel by his side and lay her hands on his knee.

"You'd be proud of me, father, if I were to win a name."

"Aye, aye, Janey! I have always said as you was not ordinary. Your mother and me, we hoped as you might settle down; and I thought, as may be, you'd tend us both a bit when we was feeble with years. I pictured you, my lass, full a score of times reading me tit-bits from the papers, and a-walking round the farm with me a-leaning on you, and larning the farm, so as to take it up arter your mother and me was dead. But there! it aint for to be. I won't say 'No,' Janey, to what your heart is fare set on; we'll let her go wid a blessing, won't we, wife?"

But the mother was silently crying. Upstairs in her own room Janet prepared to write a letter; unlike Malcombe she took little time for thought. This letter had been planned as she sat on the violet bank; she wrote rapidly now:—

Dear Mr. Malcombe,

I have just read yours. Thank you for what you say; I have nothing to forgive you for, I never misdoubted you. As you cannot now receive my love, I will say nothing about it; there is nothing before either of us but to let the dead past bury its dead.

Dear Mr. Malcombe, I venture to refer to an old project in my life, and I ask your help. I want to come to London; my parents have given me their permission. For a time I should like a situation as resident governess in a respectable family. Do you know of any such? Or what shall I do to communicate with people who need governesses; shall I advertise? I wait for your advice, but do not hurry to write.

Yours sincerely,

JANET FAIRLEIGH.





CHAPTER VIII.

DOUGLAS'S TREASURE.

MALCOMBE had made a mistake, such a mistake as men make who voluntarily give up the world God has given them to enjoy, under the idea that it is the devil's world and so sinful. So had Malcombe, under a wrong and perverted sense of duty, thrown away one of the best gifts of God, for whatever the consequence to Douglas, Malcombe had no right to throw over the woman whose love he had won. The effect of such a giving up could not but be disastrous to her, and to himself it must bring future pain. He made, however, the mistake that such a man would be sure to make, fearing joy because it was joyful. He believed the burden which he voluntarily took up to be God-sent. As such he took it up bravely, and being sure that he was doing the only thing left for him rightly to do, was supported by his own sense of right, as many another martyr has been supported in a false cause.

On the afternoon of his return to London, he took Douglas down to introduce him to Mrs. Brand.

"This is the little boy whom you last saw at a week old, Mrs. Brand," he said; "you are scarcely likely to recognise him now."

Mrs. Brand listened open-mouthed, her gown twisted up in a mop behind, her arms bare to the elbow. She had come close to Douglas, who rather shrank up to his brother.

"My heyes," she exclaimed, "aint he growed? Why there's my 'Lizar Jane who wor two months elder, why she's puny along o' him. Come along yere 'Lizar Jane, and measure yerself by this young 'un."

Eliza Jane, a red-haired maiden who was seated on the floor nursing the baby, scrambled hastily to her feet and toddled forward still clutching her heavy load. For half an instant Malcombe felt his little brother shrink up against him, then, to his astonishment, he saw him go forward and hold out his arms to the baby. Eliza Jane was all that was uninteresting, being little and wicked looking; but the baby had large pathetic eyes, and those eyes fixed on Douglas had found their way to his heart.

"May I nurse the baby?" he said to Mrs. Brand.

"Aye, may you," answered the surprised woman.

Douglas held out his arms again. His appearance was in his favour; Mrs. Brand's baby trusted him. He sat down on the floor with it, buried his head in its little neck, and instantly gave it a warm place in his affections.

"Did yer hever see the like o' that?" exclaimed the admiring mother. "There, 'Lizar Jane, you may run out fur a bit. He'll drop asleep with the little master. See! how kind he clutches of him."

"How does Eliza Jane get on with her schooling?" asked Malcombe.

“ Oh ! fine, sir ! She minds her book, I will say. I often tells the father that 'Lizar Jane 'll be a scholard on h'our hands.”

“ I am glad to hear it, Mrs. Brand.”

Malcombe then made inquiries about the other members of Mrs. Brand's numerous family. It was perfectly plain, from the way he spoke and she answered, that there was confidence between these two, and that wide as the poles as they appeared to be severed, they yet had some things in common. Having said all he could say on ordinary topics, Malcombe brought out the real object of his visit with evident reluctance.

“ And now, Mrs. Brand, I shall take an interest in all those children ; and in any trouble don't forget to look to me as a friend, but I fear I must move to a more healthy part of the town, for the sake of my little brother. He has spent all his life in the country, and I must not let him get ill for want of as good air as I can afford to give him.”

“ You're going away ? ” answered Mrs. Brand. She stood perfectly still, her lips a little apart, her face growing white. Poor woman ! It was not the money loss she was thinking of. She could easily relet her rooms, and perhaps to more profitable customers than to Malcombe, whose rent she had always kept down. But we all—the poorest, and commonest, and dullest of us—want a shelter in time of trouble ; want, in short, a god to fly to ; and Malcombe, in her ignorance of a better, represented this god and shelter to Mrs. Brand. She did not, however, beg of him to remain, or

express any outward regret: She merely said, after her first pallor and agitation, "When'll you be thinking of going, sir?"

"I shall leave by the end of this week," answered Malcombe.

Mrs. Brand then asked him if he would object to a card being placed at once in his window; and on his giving her permission to do what she liked in this respect, he called Douglas and went away.

"I shall come and nurse that dear baby again," said the little boy.

Mrs. Brand smiled faintly at this. The baby cried at his departure.

"David," asked Douglas, that night at supper, "why do you want to take me to another place? I should like to stay and nurse that little baby."

"I am afraid the air here will make you ill," answered Malcombe. "I am going to take you out to some lodgings at the other side of the park, where you will see green trees and have pure good air."

"And has the landlady any children?"

"The woman I saw to-day has not."

Douglas gave a very faint sigh. "Will that nice place be best for you, David?" he asked, after a pause; "shall you be happier there?"

"I have got on well here," said David; "I have lived here for a great many years, and it is convenient for my work, but I must not have you getting ill; you will be happy in that pretty place. Now, my boy, finish your supper."

"Yes, David, I have quite done," answered the old-fashioned child. He rose from his seat and went

up to his brother. "David, if I were to promise to keep very well, might I stay on here and see that little baby? then Mrs. Brand would not be so sorry."

"How do you know she is sorry?" asked Malcombe, surprised.

"She got so white, David, and didn't speak for nearly a minute. I think she wanted to cry, but was too proud."

David had noticed just the same thing. He scarcely, however, cared that Douglas should see things too sharply; and, after a moment's pause, he said somewhat impatiently, "I have arranged for you to go, boy; this is not the place for you. Now I am going to send you to bed."

The next day was Sunday. Douglas came downstairs rather earlier than usual. He had dressed himself in his best, had managed to brush his soft, fair hair back off his forehead in a very methodical style, and with a serious little face opened his Bible and sat down to read. Mrs. Brand was bustling in and out of the room. Douglas had usually managed to find a good deal to say to her, but to-day he vouchsafed nothing beyond a grave "Good morning."

"What have you done to your hair, my boy?" asked Malcombe when, half-an-hour later, he came downstairs. "All your curls are gone."

"'Tis only because 'tis Sunday," answered Douglas. "My aunty always wanted me to be very neat on Sunday."

"So you are, with a vengeance," replied Malcombe. "Now come to breakfast."

"What church will you go to, David?" asked Douglas, as he sipped his tea.

David was about to reply, "I don't go to church"; but something in the child's eyes seemed to stay the words on his lips. "Such a remark would pain him," he said to himself. "Poor little man! he knows of no religion except through church. For aught I know he may be right." Aloud he said, "There is a church where they have beautiful music about half-a-mile away from here. If you are ready in good time I will take you there."

"Is that the church you always go to, David?"

"No; I don't go there always."

Douglas was ready much too soon; and at the proper time they set off together. Malcombe often wondered afterwards if it was the having a creature all intense faith by his side which made that service not a weariness. He found a cry going up from his heart, as he knelt by Douglas's side. He thought an answering voice came to him, echoing softly both through responses and prayers. He felt at peace, for the first time since his great temptation. He fancied himself near Graham once more, and wondered was his friend serving in the priests' office in that temple made without hands.

From that date Malcombe always took Douglas to church, and was to all intents and purposes a churchman, though he made no profession of joining this or any other religious persuasion. As he walked home, however, on this first Sunday, he felt no love for the child, and almost hated himself for the hardness of his heart towards him. After

dinner Malcombe took down some books from his shelves, and prepared to devote himself to a rather difficult study. Douglas went to the far end of the room, and was again absorbed with his Bible. Presently there came a knock at the door. Malcombe said, "Come in," and Eliza Jane, carrying the baby, entered.

"I thought as may be Douglas 'ud like to see the young 'un in his Sunday best," she said, dropping a curtsy; and added, addressing Malcombe, "May I stay for a bit, and look at Douglas a-nussing of him?"

Douglas had thrown down his Bible, and was clasping the baby to his heart.

"May I stay?" repeated Eliza Jane.

"Yes," replied Malcombe, "you may all stay over there in that corner. Don't make much noise."

Eliza Jane dropped another curtsy, and grinned from ear to ear. Then she turned to Douglas. "Now give me the babby back," she said, "and you sit on this little stool; then you can clutch him comfortable like."

This being satisfactorily arranged, Eliza Jane seated herself exactly opposite Douglas and the large fat baby, who sucked his thumb, and opened and shut his eyes in the most complacent style.

"Does yer like him very much?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Douglas.

"Now, I'll be blowed; but I'd real like yer to tell me why."

"I think," answered Douglas, "'tis because he's soft and warm—something like a kitten. I never

loved anything before as much as I love this baby, except a kitten, and the kitten died."

"I wishes mother ud give yer the baby," said Eliza Jane, "I don't love it; I'm tired to death of it."

"I *wish* she would," answered Douglas.

"Well, why don't yer stay yere, then yer could have a deal of nussing of it?"

"My brother doesn't wish it," answered Douglas.

"Now that aint true," replied Mrs. Brand's daughter. "I'm shamed of yer for telling such lies; yer brother have always lived yere, and he would not, no for nothink, live away from mother. He thinks a sight of mother, and indeed of me and hall of us. He's going away cause yer delicate, and a fine gentleman. If I were you I'd be shamed."

Poor Douglas coloured very high. He longed to say, "I would give worlds to stay and take care of the baby." He looked at his brother, but Malcombe's head was bent over his book. Then he said in a brave voice, "'Tis right for me to go, Eliza Jane; my brother knows best."

"Oh! aint you queer," answered Eliza Jane. "Mother says as yer were such a rum little un. Mother held yer in her arms when yer were a babby and then she took yer down to the h'old lady. Mother often telled me how yer didn't want to go away from her, and how the old lady were jest mad, as yer liked mother best. Mother said as yer'd have a real hard time with her."

"Don't," said Douglas; "I hadn't."

"Why, I never; were yer fond of her?"

"Yes."

"Well, tell us what yer did hall day long, tell us, do. I'm hall hungering to know."

"Shall I tell you just how I spent my day," asked Douglas.

"Yes, I'd love to know."

"I got up at seven. I used to sleep in a little bed in my aunt's room. When I was dressed I went downstairs, and we had prayers."

"What's prayers?" asked Eliza Jane.

"I mean that we knelt down and asked God to take care of us; shall I tell you what we said?"

"No," said Eliza Jane, "that's sure to be dull; go on to the story part."

"After prayers we had breakfast. I used to eat porridge for breakfast."

"What's that like?" interrupted his questioner.

"Oh! I don't know; it was something like pudding. I can't tell my story if you talk so much."

"Go on, Douglas, I won't speak another word."

She kept her promise until Douglas got to his play in the garden. When he described how he had made friends and companions of the apple-trees and gooseberry-bushes, Mrs. Brand's daughter felt her patience giving way.

"Oh, my!" she exclaimed, "I guess yer were a little light in the head."

Douglas said he did not know what she meant, and continued his tale. He managed at last to rouse her sympathy. She asked a great many questions as to the manner of his aunt's death, and said sighingly how much she would have en-

joyed looking at the corpse. Finally, she concluded that Douglas would have a poor time of it up in London, and for her part she was sorry for him.

"Yer a werry, werry rum young 'un, Douglas," she added, "and I guess as yer'll never know another happy moment. I wouldn't be you for a deal."

But just then the baby first yawned, then raised his head, stared fixedly at Douglas, and, finally, with a smile, put up his soft podgy hand and stroked his face.

"I'm very happy now," answered the child.

"Yes, cause yer have the babby; but yer going away, yer knows. Yer'll have no babby where yer a-going to."

Shortly afterwards Mrs. Brand's shrill voice was heard shouting "'Lizar Jane!" and that young person vanished, dragging the baby with her.

"Come here, Douglas," said Malcombe.

The little fellow approached his brother slowly.

"I wish to tell you that I have changed my mind, boy. I shall stay at Mrs. Brand's for another month, to try how it agrees with you. During that time you may play with the baby for one hour daily; that is, if Mrs. Brand will bring him up here to you. You are not to go to her room without me; and I wish you to speak very little to Eliza Jane. You may play with the baby up here, every day."

For answer, Douglas rushed away from his brother, threw himself flat down on his hands and face, and burst into tears.

"But 'tis only because I'm too happy," he sobbed.



CHAPTER IX.

JANET'S ANSWER TO MRS. BYNG.

THAT night the two brothers, who occupied the same room, were kept awake by different causes. Some tears were wetting Douglas's pale cheeks, his little hands were clasped, and the strange child was looking into the shadowy room, just rendered distinct by the lamplight outside, with earnest wide open eyes. He had thanked God four times already, but the weight of his gratitude was still banishing all thoughts of sleep. He had visions of himself and that baby, in all possible and impossible places, at all possible and impossible times. This was the first human creature who had come to him of its own free-will. He imagined the joy of watching the growth of his first human plaything, of hearing it speak, of teaching it words. Rose-coloured, indeed, was the light Douglas had thrown round Mrs. Brand's tenth, and rather unwelcome offspring. The lonely little heart, which all these days had been bleeding inwardly, began to heal; the grave and somewhat sad nature to turn back to hope. Mrs. Brand's baby had certainly come into the world with a mission, and Douglas, in his thankfulness, forgot that he was not alone, and prayed aloud.

"I'm very much obliged to You, dear Jesus Christ. I never thought You could be so kind as to give me a dear baby to love. Oh! how hard I shall try to be good now."

Malcombe, who was awake from a very different cause, in whose heart was certainly then springing up no special well of thanksgiving, heard these fervent words. They touched him, giving him for the first time a slight insight into the uncommon nature of the child.

"How unlike the boy is to his parents," he thought. "There is no shallowness there. A strange nature; I can't make much of it. But he can suffer and love; much, too, if I mistake not. I am glad I have let him have that baby as a safety-valve."

But even yet Malcombe's own heart was by no means touched by Douglas. Perhaps he saw in him but too plainly the sacrifice which had torn his very heart-strings. The man's whole nature just then was in a bruised condition—too full of pain to recognise any of what seemed to him the barren joys of duty. Indeed, he was trying an impossibility: endeavouring with all his might and main to banish Janet from his thoughts.

Her letter, which awaited him the next morning, gave, all the more for this reason, a shock. He felt that he was scarcely strong enough to hear from her just then. He was certainly not strong enough to receive the letter she had written. Its reserve, its coldness, its brevity, hid nothing from his clear mind. He could scarcely believe as possible that the woman whom he held as most noble

in the world should so address him. He had poured out his whole heart to her, and she in return, when of all times he most surely needed bread, had given to him a stone. Had she not replied at all he would have felt that she had done wisely; but to ignore his purgatory, his agony! No! this was not the worst. The worst, the sorest part, was that he dimly felt that she was injured, that she had fallen down a peg; and he had done it. Her request, too, was a subject of regret; for he knew that it would be very bad for them both to be together in London just then.

The hour, however, had come when he must go to his tutions. He put the letter in his pocket, and set out with a heavy heart. The first part of his day was now devoted to the crippled only son of a man of wealth and culture. He was highly paid for this tutorship, and it was with this money he hoped to be able to support Douglas. This morning, however, his little pupil was too ill to receive instruction. He had been hurt in some too rough play with his little sister, who now stood in disgrace in a corner of the room, while the young mother bent anxiously over the suffering boy.

"Mr. Malcombe," said Mrs. Byng, in her eager, impulsive way, "I want a governess, in a great hurry, for Flora. Do you happen to know any young lady you can recommend?"

Equally with impulse did Malcombe mention Janet. He felt he had made a mistake the moment her name had passed his lips, but Mrs Byng had found Flora too troublesome not to take up the *idea* eagerly. She asked many questions, and,

before Malcombe took his departure, had taken down Janet's name and address, and had promised to lose no time in writing to her. When Malcombe got home that night, he also wrote to Janet. He told her what he had done, and spoke of the situation as an advantageous one. In conclusion, he added: "Now I must tell you plainly what my fear is. I acted on impulse when I mentioned you to Mrs. Byng; had I reflected, I should have preferred to recommend you to another house. I have, just for myself, entered on an engagement to instruct Edgar Byng for three months. Thus, you perceive, we shall be working daily in the same house. We may often see each other. This is a temptation; a pain which, perhaps, we are scarcely wise to encounter. I mention it, as it remains in your power to decline the situation."

But Janet did not decline.





CHAPTER X.

AN ELF PUTS HER FINGER IN THE PIE.

IT was a day of summer rain. Splash ! splash ! it dropped into the little puddles in the streets, and fell on the tops of carriages and cabs and open umbrellas. The water-cress sellers and the numerous other street vendors felt their scanty rags clinging closer around them, and the crossing-sweepers did a thriving trade. The rain fell in that even down-pour which admitted of no possibility of change for some hours to come. The inhabitants of the great West-end houses gave up all hopes of driving in the Park, and the children looked wistfully from their nursery windows. From one special window in a tall house, situated in one of the most fashionable squares, a boy and a girl gazed eagerly.

"You don't think the rain will make her stay away, do you, Podge?" asked a clear voice.

"Of course not, you Elf; your freedom is nearly over."

The first speaker was a pretty dark-eyed girl of about ten, the last a boy of nearer twelve. The boy was not handsome; he was thin and wizened, and when he walked he used a crutch.

"You'll be kept as hard at work as I am, Elf;

nothing but books from morning till night. You won't like it, not a bit."

"Mr. Malcombe looks very kind," answered the Elf. "If my governess is like him, I shall love her. I love Mr. Malcombe."

"You won't see much more of him, then; you'll be too busy."

"What do you mean? I shall have my lessons in the same room. We have only one school-room."

"No, you won't; there's another room being got ready for you."

"But when Miss Trinder was here, and you had that dull Mr. Jack, we always used the same room. 'Tis so big, you know, we don't disturb each other. Don't have me sent away, Podge, for I love to look at Mr. Malcombe."

The brother addressed as Podge laughed with mischievous glee.

"Mr. Malcombe does not care to look at you then, Elf, for it was he who asked mother to give us a room to ourselves. He said he could teach me better without interruption."

"I don't believe it," answered the Elf, sceptically. She looked with dismal eyes out of the window for a moment or two longer, then ran downstairs to her mother. She found that lady in the drawing-room.

"Mammy! Podge says you are going to turn me out of the dear old school-room. 'Tis not true, is it? I may have my lessons there, when Miss Fairleigh comes?"

"No, Flora, love. Mr. Malcombe wishes to teach Edgar by himself."

"Then I think 'tis mean of him. He knows as well as possible that I love him; I won't love him any more. Oh, mother! may I go in the carriage to fetch Miss Fairleigh?"

"No, dear; I am not sending the carriage. It is so wet that I scarcely expect her this afternoon."

"Jolly! I shall have another day with Podge and Mr. Malcombe."

Elf-like, the erratic creature again withdrew, and ran upstairs to communicate this new hope to Podge. Alas! could little Flora Byng have been clairvoyant she would have perceived how fleeting were her present hopes, for at that very moment there alighted from a second-class carriage at Paddington a young lady dressed very neatly in a waterproof and plain brown straw bonnet. This young lady was Janet Fairleigh. Had Flora's mother known anything of the real character of her new governess, she would never have supposed that a little rain would have prevented her keeping an appointment. Janet, with the hard look very marked on her young face, stepped out of the carriage, collected her various traps around her, and then for a moment or two looked irresolute. Mrs. Byng had promised to send some one to meet her, and undefined hopes had suggested to Janet the possibility that Malcombe might be the messenger. But no face that she knew, no face even with inquiry written on it, was in sight. She would scarcely own to herself that she was disappointed, but the very slight shade of bitterness round her firm lips was a little more marked as she turned to the porter who attended her.

"I am going to a lady of the name of Byng, in Portman Square. I expected her carriage to meet me; it may possibly be waiting outside."

"If you'll just stay there for a minute, Miss, I'll run and try," answered the man. As he ran past, a voice shouted—

"Maddon! when you have done with that lady, I want you here to lend a hand with these trucks."

Janet started. The story of Douglas was too sore in her memory for anything, however trivial in connection with it, to be forgotten. She instantly remembered that Maddon was the name of Douglas's lost father. When the man came back she looked at him earnestly. He was a slightly built man of middle age, had a slouching gait, and pale, ill-looking face. Weakness was written on every line of the man's physiognomy—weakness and all the sins which accompany cowardice. Janet instantly knew him to be a tool for other men's wickedness.

"There's nobody waiting for you, Miss," he said, when he came back.

"He speaks without dialect," instantly commented the clear-witted girl. Aloud she said, "Then, if you will kindly call a cab, I shall not delay any longer."

At parting she gave Maddon sixpence. Looking again earnestly at his face, she was not likely to forget it.

Little Flora Byng uttered a shout when she saw a cab laden with luggage draw up to the door. It was rather disappointing that Miss Fairleigh should come when her mother had put into her head the

hope of another holiday. But then, on the other hand, her arrival would be a delightful break to the monotony of this dreadful wet day. Little Flora was dancing on the steps before Miss Fairleigh had time to enter the house.

"I know who you are; you're my new governess. Mother is out. You won't see mother for an hour or two. But I'll take care of you. Come upstairs now to Podge." The Elf had never been troubled with shyness, and chattered without allowing Janet to get in a word, as she dragged her upstairs.

"I hope you'll be kind," she said, "and not give me too many lessons. Miss Trinder, my last governess, was very kind. She gave me a holiday whenever I asked for one. I hope you will do the same. Do you know I am rather glad you have come now, as 't will amuse me this wet day. But I did hope that you might be afraid of the rain, and put off till to-morrow."

They had reached the school-room door, which Flora threw open with a bang.

"Podge, this is my new governess. This is Miss Fairleigh."

Little Edgar Byng came forward politely, and Janet, sitting down by him, began to talk. The Elf danced about.

"Do you like our school-room?" she said. "But oh! I forgot. I have sad news for you; you and I are not to have our lessons here. Mother is getting ready a little room upstairs for us, not half so nice a room as this. It has only a view of some nasty back houses. 'Tis all Mr. Malcombe's

fault; he is Podge's man—governess, you know. Tutor, he calls him; however, he is really just the same as you. Oh! he is nice. I'm sure you'd love him; I do. But I was nearly forgetting. I always had my lessons in this dear room when Miss Trinder was here; and Mr. Jack used not to mind at all, because, you see, the room is so very big. But Mr. Malcombe, I don't think it was kind of him. He asked mother to give you and me a room to ourselves; he did not wish us to be in the room with him."

Janet's face, pale already from the slight fatigue of her journey, was just a shade paler now. The thoughtless Elf still danced about and chattered. Little Edgar Byng looked at her, and said, "You know Mr. Malcombe, don't you? It was he who told mother about you."

"Yes, I know him. I should like to go to my room now."

The Elf was sorely puzzled to account for Podge's provoking silence for nearly half-an-hour afterwards.





CHAPTER XI.

MRS. BYNG BEGINS TO THINK.

MRS. BYNG found her new governess a success. She was very quiet, very gentle in her manner, but at the same time she insisted on obedience. Flora found she must not shirk her tasks. What Miss Fairleigh wished done had to be done. Flora became quite docile. She worked hard, and also looked happy. This latter fact—the fact that Flora should have to learn her lessons and yet not be utterly miserable—was the item which completely puzzled Mrs. Byng. Many governesses had the tuition of this young lady before she became Miss Fairleigh's pupil. Some indulged her to her heart's content; from them she learned nothing. Others chose a more rigorous treatment; with them she was miserable. Miss Fairleigh neither indulged nor was severe; and the Elf's little face had never been brighter.

Mrs. Byng was quite inclined to be friendly with this valuable governess. She often went into the school-room for a chat, and she insisted on Miss Fairleigh coming down to the drawing-room every evening. These invitations Miss Fairleigh never refused. Simply dressed, never for an instant forgetting her position in the family, the quiet

young girl would glide into the brilliantly lighted room, sit down in a remote corner, neither expecting nor getting much attention. I mentioned before that Janet never indulged in the feminine occupation of needlework. She brought no pretty fancy knitting, nor any other excuse for idleness, into Mrs. Byng's drawing-room; but, when not spoken to, sat with her hands folded on her lap. Once or twice she was asked to arrange the parts in a musical duet, or to assist in turning over leaves; but Janet was no true musician, and her services were not often required.

Mr. Byng was a man of much literary taste and culture, and many pleasant people visited at his house. For two hours out of four evenings in the week, Mr. and Mrs. Byng were at home to any one who might call, and always on these evenings people came who were interesting to watch and to listen to. Three months ago Janet would have thought herself more than fortunate to have entered so charmed a circle. Even now, reserved as she looked, her face was too intelligent and full of character not to attract now and then to her side a man of education and refinement. Even to hear such a person speak would have caused her heart to beat wildly three months ago.

Mrs. Byng was one of the kindest people who ever lived. She would have liked Janet to feel at home with her guests; at least, to feel at home with her. She wanted to see smiles playing freely round lips so young, and the light of enthusiasm and pleasure lighting up the dull depths of those dark eyes. But Janet never unbent, never smiled

spontaneously, and her reserve and coldness at last really pained her kind-hearted employer.

One day she consulted her husband.

"I cannot understand why our Elf should get on so well with Miss Fairleigh, John. That she does get on with her, and is much improved, and bright and happy, is a self-evident fact; but Miss Fairleigh is a strange girl, I don't understand her. I am not quite sure that I like her."

"She scarcely looks happy," replied Mr. Byng; "but this is her first situation, is it not? Perhaps she is home-sick."

"No, John, that can scarcely be it. She tells me she has spent the greater part of her life away from her parents at school, and it was her own wish to leave them now. They have plenty of money to keep her at home."

"I have observed one thing," continued Mr. Byng, "that girl, reserved as she thinks herself, now and then lets a secret out through her eyes. I have noticed that never, by any chance, does James appear, to announce a fresh visitor in the evening, without a certain flash of expectation filling her eyes, dying away the very moment the individual announced enters the room. Can she possibly know some one who she hopes may call here some evening?"

"She knows our boy's tutor, Mr. Malcombe," said Mrs. Byng; "I never thought of that before. Of course she knows him, as it was he who gave me an introduction to her. I have now and then asked him to drop in in the evening, but he has *never* come. He tells me he wants the time for

study. Poor child ! I will ask him again ; I dare say it would do her good to see an old friend."

The next morning Mrs. Byng went upstairs to Edgar's study.

"I want to ask a favour of you, Mr. Malcombe. You have never yet given us an evening. We expect some really interesting people here to-night ; may we expect you ?"

Malcombe's face looked hesitating, but his words were firm enough.

"Did I ever go out in the evening I should be only too glad to come to you, Mrs. Byng ; but I never do."

"Will you not make an exception in our favour?"

"I would do so, did I ever make exceptions."

Mrs. Byng could scarcely be offended, for Malcombe's words were uttered courteously ; but she saw it was useless to try to persuade him.

"Mr. Malcombe," said little Edgar, that day as they parted, "Why don't you ever ask to see Miss Fairleigh ? she knows you quite well."

"I shall be very glad to see her some day, my boy, but not now," replied the tutor.

All these remarks little Edgar retailed to the Elf, who in her turn gave them in exaggerated form to her governess.

The next Sunday Janet asked Flora to come with her to a new church. The governess and the little girl set off early, as the church in question was at some little distance. Any novelty pleased the Elf, and she skipped along in her gayest manner. These ebullitions of spirit Janet never restrained, which, doubtless, partly accounted for the influence

she had already gained over the wild little creature. They arrived in good time, and seated themselves in one of the free pews near the door. Suddenly little Flora started, caught her companion's sleeve, and whispered eagerly—

“Look, look! there is Mr. Malcombe going up the aisle. I am so sorry the little boy is not with him to-day.”

Janet, however, gave no start, for what she saw she was prepared to see. By the merest accident she had heard that Malcombe attended this church. Hence her resolve to come there too. But though she gave no outward sign, no prayer came from that torn heart during the service. She saw no other human being. Alas! she felt no influence of a God. Her whole body, soul, and spirit, were absorbed in one great cry for her idol. During one sentence, indeed, of the Litany her lips might have been seen to move. “In all time of my tribulation, good Lord, deliver me.”

But even then there was little faith in the cry, none, none at all in the heart. When the service came to an end, Janet would allow Flora to make no sign to attract Malcombe's attention. She took her little pupil's hand, and walked home in silence. After lunch, and not before, could she get alone. Then, indeed, in the privacy of her own luxurious bedroom, did her self-control give way.

“Is he forgetting me? If he is forgetting me I cannot bear it,” she moaned.



CHAPTER XII.

SUSPENSE.

AS days and weeks went by, Malcombe began gradually to recover his peace of mind; he believed that he had done right, and this consciousness supported him. He believed that God, for some wise reason, meant to deny to him the joys of other men; he bowed to what seemed to him God's will. Those who do that, whether mistaken or not in their main actions, must have at least the comforting smile of their own conscience to support them. Malcombe had this smile, and in this he and Janet differed widely; for Janet, believing too that it was God's will to part them, rebelled wildly against that will. This was to be expected from her nature, and yet Janet and Malcombe, both in their different ways and different natures, were suffering. Peace, it is true, had come back to the man; but though he believed he was doing right, yet still his heart, parted from that which it loved best, ached and bled inwardly. He had ceased to complain of this pain, but it is impossible to suppose he did not feel it, for it was, indeed, his true nature rebelling against his false.

He still loved Janet. Joined to his love, he had an uneasy feeling that he had injured her, that by his unfortunate love he had cast a blight over the creature he most longed to benefit. This feeling was more an uneasy intuition than a certainty, for he never saw Janet, and had no grounds to go on but that one short, cold letter which he had received from her. Still his love was not one whit shaken.

Never in all his life had Malcombe felt so human as now. Human longings were stirring in him, human desires making his heart beat. He longed for a home. He was tired of this everlasting dwelling in tents. He wanted to cast a firm anchor down here. In short, his human heart longed passionately for what has never yet been found down here, an abiding city.

When he knew that Janet had made up her mind, not only to come to London, but to take up her abode in a house which he must visit daily, he resolved at least that they must not meet. With this resolve he spoke to Mrs. Byng, asking for a separate school-room. Because of this resolve he never accepted any evening invitations to this house. He often reproached himself with cowardice in thus dreading to meet Janet ; but he knew his own heart well enough just then to feel that the only truly brave course was to flee temptation. Still, morning after morning, as he approached the door of the Byng's fine mansion, that poor human heart beat painfully. Once, as he taught Edgar, he heard Janet's voice on the stairs, and he knew *that* the hand with which he guided his pupil's

attempts at some new kind of drawing trembled. Still, Malcombe was not really unhappy. No man who faithfully tries to do what he believes to be his duty can be that. He was having, even in the midst of his pain, some comfort; and this comfort was coming to him in a series of pleasant surprises. All his life the man had lived humbly; he had never thought great things of himself. Had any one called him a philanthropist, a doer of good to others, he would have sadly disclaimed any such high-sounding title. He was really unaware that his days had been spent in self-sacrifice, that his life had been given to others. He never guessed how, in that very unassuming, humble career, he had cast much seed on the waters. Therefore, when the bread thus sown came in, his surprise was great.

"Lord, when saw I Thee an hungred and fed Thee?" was his cry. Nevertheless when his Lord answered him he could not but rejoice. His first great cause of satisfaction came from the lame boy. This lad had won a scholarship through Malcombe's unwearying patience. His career was now assured. It was in the grateful, happy light in this poor lad's sunken eyes that Malcombe read his reward. Mrs. Brand, too—so thankful, so charmed that he had not left her—redoubled her attentions. Hard did this much-tempted woman try to abstain from drink, because when Malcombe saw she had given way he never reproached her.

"But his heyes 'ud be worser than a score o' words," she would be heard to say. "I can't abear Mr. Malcombe's heyes when he's sorry like."

But greater than any other reward to Malcombe just then was a happy little face that, day after day growing brighter and healthier, welcomed him when he came home. Strange as it may seem, the country child did not pine in the unwholesome London home. Malcombe very soon ceased to fear that Mrs. Brand's house would disagree with Douglas. Far from disagreeing with him, he seemed to grow better there. He was less old-fashioned, more like an everyday child. He laughed gaily, the colour came into his cheeks, he was all alive and full of interest, almost too eager about what went on around him. Malcombe gave him tasks which he learned without difficulty. Malcombe saw that he was intelligent, nay, more, that he was athirst for knowledge. The child, too, was docile and obedient, content to obey Malcombe in all things, never anxious to go out except when Malcombe could take him; and this, with the best intentions in the world, could not happen every day. Once his brother said to him—

“What makes you so well here, my boy? You are a much healthier looking lad than when I brought you from that fine country place.”

Little Douglas, not half understanding the reason, struck nevertheless at the root of the matter.

“I'm so very happy here, David.”

And this was the secret. When will the great lesson, which nature tries to teach us everywhere, be learned—that children require happiness more than pure air; love, more than nourishing food? For happiness, which is love, is the true sunshine of a little child's life.

Douglas had loved his aunt very much, but this old-world woman had never allowed caresses, had forbidden extravagant words. She had trained the child carefully, but primly; crushing down what was spontaneous and real in the little heart. He loved her, for so affectionate a creature must twine his heart-strings round some one; but I feel no doubt he got more real satisfaction out of the trees and flowers, with which the old-fashioned garden abounded. Marie-Antoinette, and Washington, and the little Princes in the Tower, could speak more really to his nature than his aunt could ever do.

But, after all, even they were dead; even they were but creatures of his too active brain. No wonder he was happier in the dull London house, for here, for the first time, he found a friend; a warm, living companionship; a heart that could beat against his own; a living creature on whom unchecked, unwatched, unproved, he could lavish his love. I can never half say what a good work Mrs. Brand's baby did in its short life. How it saved a little heart, and brought into living and practical companionship with its fellow-men a very fine human nature. Malcombe had truly sacrificed much for the sake of his little brother, but it was not given to Malcombe really to save the child. This was effected by warm baby lips; by round wondering baby eyes; by the constant feel of chubby little baby fingers. Douglas never now talked of his old-world fancies, but he lived for the baby, and because of the baby, for other similar babies; in short, he began already to put forth his little hands to help this suffering world.



CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. BYNG'S THOUGHTS RESOLVE THEMSELVES IN ACTIONS.

MALCOMBE had quite determined not to meet Janet for some time. He did not doubt that a period would arrive when they might see each other without pain or injury to either, but that day must be distant. At present his plain course was to avoid temptation. For a long period Malcombe quite felt that fortune favoured him in his resolve. He went daily to the house where she lived, and yet never saw her, never, except on one occasion, even heard her voice. He began to hope that, in the great world of London, these two lives which so longed to unite might yet be effectually divided.

But such a course of events, favourable to the prayer which in pain of heart he daily used, "Lead us not into temptation," could scarcely continue. There were two reasons against its continuing; the first was Janet herself. Janet was resolved not only to see Malcombe again, but to win him back to her side. She did not mean to hurry, she resolved to have great patience; but the purpose which brought her to town was never lost sight of by her. She would certainly contrive to see and

speaking to Malcombe again, but just yet she thought it best to wait, just yet she would not press the matter. By and by Janet would have contrived this meeting, but it would not have come about so soon but for an unexpected ally. This ally was her kind-hearted employer, Mrs. Byng. I have hinted before that Mrs. Byng had a large generous nature; she would do a kindness to any one. She treated all human beings as one who never forgot their humanity. Governesses had always a good time in her house. To her they were not paid servants, but young women, many of them pretty women, who had feelings, ambitions, talents, which it was her duty to help and encourage. If there was one thing more than another which brought to her positive pain, it was a sad face in her house. When there was any undeclared sorrow on any young girl's brow, she always put it down to an unfortunate love affair. It was the delight of her life to set these tangled love affairs straight.

Already two of Flora's many governesses had poured out their woes in her ears, and, thanks to her judicious management, had gone away engaged young women, and were now happily married. Mrs. Byng was quickly interested in Janet, and when she found that not all her sympathy and hints drew forth the slightest approach to confidence, her interest did not flag, but her curiosity was awakened. She felt there was a mystery; she resolved to solve it. It required, perhaps, no great stretch of genius to connect Janet and Malcombe; she had noticed his momentary eagerness when she had asked him to come to one of her evenings.

She thought his marked refusal almost unnatural. She did not forget that he knew Janet. With this knowledge she spoke to Janet about him, to him about Janet. On each face she saw, or thought she saw, the shadow of carefully hid feeling. This was enough for her; she knew now why Janet was unhappy. She and Malcombe were lovers, and had quarrelled. It was her delightful mission to bring them together again. She would bring about a meeting; and first, at least, it should be in her drawing-room. But she too would not make haste, and her plans did not come to perfection until Janet had been with her some months—not, indeed, until the winter, when the family had just returned to town. To aid her then she called her husband into consultation. Between them they got up a pretext, by means of which Malcombe could only refuse to come to them by making himself a very bear. He did not wish to do this; the few months, too, which had gone by had given him strength. He accepted Mrs. Byng's pressing request. Her next care was to keep Janet in total ignorance. She had no thought of cruelty in this; but she could not resist the delight of learning, in one glance at the astonished girl's face, the truth of all her suspicions. It would spoil everything to put her on her guard.

The appointed evening came. Janet, at Mrs. Byng's request, was in the drawing-room early. She came into the room in her usual simple dress, black silk, but it fitted well, and Mrs. Byng had taken care to supply her with some brilliant hot-house flowers, which she had arranged skilfully in

her black hair. She looked nice, brighter than usual, and the marked intelligence on her face gave her a certain look of distinction. Could the old couple at the Home Farm have seen her just then, they would have felt more sure than usual of the certain fate of their ugly duckling. Janet went over at once to the piano, and began to arrange what music would be wanted. Meanwhile guests appeared quickly on the scene. Mr. Byng always had a sprinkling of literary and artistic society at his evenings. He liked people with character, and was a strong upholder of women's rights. Consequently, persons affecting strange dress, and sometimes strange manners, were now and then to be found at his house. He liked to have it so, for both he and his wife hated conventionalities. Janet, seldom having much to do on these evenings, liked to watch the characters. To-night the assemblage was more striking than usual. A lady artist of some renown blazed near her in ruby-coloured velvet. By her side, equally self-complacent, sat a girl in a black alpaca frock, hands not too well washed, collar not overclean. Two noisy girl medical students entered the room, young, pretty, and sisters; they talked to every one of the dissecting-room, and seemed much to enjoy the effect produced by their peculiar get-up. They wore flimsy short black skirts, bright scarlet tight-fitting jackets; their hair was cut in the universal fringe; little black silk handkerchiefs were twisted round their heads. Then entered a lovely girl with her mother, who was immediately greeted with a buzz of admiration. Her golden hair surrounded her classical

face like a halo ; complete childlike unconsciousness characterised every one of her graceful movements. She was the beautiful daughter of a well-known artist, and her face had been seen in many pictures at the Academy. A moment later a young lady and gentleman of the modern school of art appeared. They were brother and sister, and no one who saw them could doubt the relationship. Being identical in every feature, the description of one will suffice ; that one shall be the young lady. Her general effect was dimness. On a nearer view it would assuredly, except to ardent admirers of the school she aped, have resolved itself into dulness. This young lady possessed a faded complexion ; in plain English it would have been called muddy. She had no brightness anywhere ; her hair was hay-coloured, one shade darker than her skin ; her features were long, rather large, her face long ; her eyes were large, but of the lightest blue, and her eyelashes and eyebrows exactly matched her hair. She had secured, doubtless with great difficulty, unless the material was made to order, a dress the exact shade of her complexion. This dress, tight-fitting, was absolutely without either frill, flounce, or ornament of any sort ; it was open low at the throat to display the full length of a very long neck ; no velvet or necklace encircled this neck. The young lady evidently thought ornament unworthy of her school. She sat down on the first chair she came to, folded her hands on her lap, and drooping her large eyelids, looked on the floor. In this attitude she doubtless represented more than one of her favourite painter's heroines. So some

of her admirers seemed to think, for more than one man approached. She looked sadder and sadder as they addressed her, occasionally raised her eyes, but never answered except in monosyllables. Presently she was asked to sing: her brother and counterpart played her accompaniment. She stood droopingly behind him, interlaced her long fingers, and whispered something. Not even her nearest neighbours could distinguish a word as she sang; there was no change of expression on her passionless sad face.

"Do you admire her?" whispered Mrs. Byng to Janet, who was standing near. "She is Miss Silvester; rather celebrated, you know."

"I never heard of her before," answered Janet. "I have watched her. I think I have seldom seen any one plainer or more uninteresting in my life."

"Oh! my dear, that is rank heresy. Miss Silvester is thought very beautiful; she is in the most fashionable style—so æsthetic."

Here Mrs. Byng thought she heard a fresh voice. Perhaps Malcombe had come. She left Janet and hurried to meet him.

Yes, he was there, mingling with a group who lingered near the door. Mrs. Byng welcomed him warmly. In her heart she felt prouder of having won her boy's humble tutor to come to her evening, than she was of any of the lions, real enough, who often graced her assemblies. She talked to him for a little, then slipped her hand through his arm.

"I must take you to an old friend, Mr. Malcombe. You have not forgotten that nice girl you recommended for Flora; she is here."

"You mean Miss Fairleigh," answered Malcombe, in his quietest tone.

"Yes ; I mean Miss Fairleigh. She is here."

Janet was engaged in turning over some music for one of the medical students. This young lady's very noisy fantasia had prevented her either hearing or seeing. Mrs. Byng felt that the moment of bliss had come. She touched her young governess's arm.

"Miss Fairleigh, I will take your place there. I have brought an old acquaintance, Mr. Malcombe."

Was it altogether so pleasurable ? Janet turned white as death, struggled to say something, and very nearly lost her self-control. Mrs. Byng needed to know no more, but pity mingled with her delight.

"This part of the room is warm, my dear. Go and talk to your friend near the door." Then she dismissed them, and tried to believe that she had done the wisest thing in the world.

Malcombe gave Janet one glance of keen pity. Any doubt he had ever had as to the genuineness of her love for himself vanished. She loved him. She had not forgotten him one bit. He could not enough regret that they had met. He was too unselfish, however, to think much of his own pain just then ; that would visit him by and by. He wondered how best he could help Janet—now, to outward composure, by and by to peace—for he saw a sad change in the face of this girl and the face of the girl he had last parted with on that lovely summer day at the Home Farm. Janet,

however, notwithstanding the strength of her feelings, was not one long to remain in outward agitation. She quickly grew composed. For half-an-hour or so they stood together near the conservatory, talking of common everyday matters. Malcombe made the inquiries he ought to make, Janet answered as she should have done. At the end of half-an-hour they separated, Janet returning to her post as guard of the piano, Malcombe claiming the attention of an old acquaintance. But before they parted Janet had spoken of Douglas, had expressed a wish to see him, and had extracted a promise from Malcombe that he would himself take her and Flora to see his little brother.





CHAPTER XIV.

A LOOK AND ITS MEANING.

“YOU need not watch this tiresome piano,” said Mrs. Byng when Janet returned to her post. “Go back, my dear, and talk to your friend. You are glad to meet, are you not?”

“Yes,” answered Janet, in her calmest tone; “it was a pleasure, but we have had our talk, thank you, Mrs. Byng. I can now return to my duty.”

Before Mrs. Byng could reply to this, a servant approached and said something to her.

“Yes! yes! certainly,” she answered, “ask the lady and gentleman to come up; I shall be delighted to see them.”

Then she came back to Janet.

“Miss Fairleigh, it is surprise on surprise. This ought to be a red-letter night to you; some special friends of yours have arrived. I shall leave you to guess who they are.”

“Friends of mine!” said Janet, “that is scarcely possible. I have no friends in London, except Mr. Malcombe.”

“Oh! yes you have, my dear, and here they are. Come with me to meet them.”

Janet followed Mrs. Byng and then stood still,

too astonished, and, yes, too annoyed to speak. She had a horrible sensation that her first feeling was shame and anger, and that these emotions she could not subdue; for there, standing in the doorway, with pleased and wondering smiles on their dear old faces, stood, in their most obsolete attire, the old couple from Home Farm. They had not an idea how to behave, and had a sort of vague notion that they had suddenly been introduced to a play. Mrs. Byng came forward politely and graciously. Even she had an uncomfortable feeling that they were a grotesque old pair, that her guests might laugh at them; that she should have liked old Mr. Fairleigh to have removed a little of the mud from his boots. Nothing, however, could long disturb the natural sweetness of her nature, and it was with all sincerity she held out her hand to the old woman.

"I am glad to see you, Mrs. Fairleigh. I hope you will think your daughter looking well?"

"Eh! dear mem," replied the old woman, not taking the offered hand, but dropping a profound courtesy; "you're very condescending, I'm sure. We was fair longing, Dan'el and me, to see our gel. And is she one of the play-actors, mem? We'll not disturb her, we'll wait, my old man and me, till you have finished, mem."

Mrs. Byng could not help looking puzzled. Janet, standing just behind her, hearing every word, stood rooted to the spot; her cheeks burned with shame. At that moment she would have liked the ground to open and hide her; her feelings for her old parents were far removed from love. Standing just behind her hostess, she was hidden from the

old couple by her taller figure. Wondering at her silence, Mrs. Byng at last turned round; at the same moment Janet was conscious that the eyes of Malcombe were fixed on her. They seemed to blaze right into hers, and to express but one emotion, and that was scorn.

"They are your parents," he said, as he passed her. The next instant he was wringing heartily a hand each of the old couple.

"I am delighted to see you. Welcome to London. Mrs. Byng, these are very dear old friends of mine."

But just then the old father caught sight of Janet's lingering figure. He dropped Malcombe's hand, and pushed his way hastily through a little group of spectators.

"Janey, my bairn, my dear lass," he said, "your mother and me, we 'as come to Lunnon to see you. You never writ us no letters for a long time, lass; we was sore and hungered, so we came."

He put his old arms around her neck, and his long gray hair fell on her shoulders. Janet neither repulsed the caress, but neither did she return it. Overcome by many emotions, most of all by Malcombe's look of scorn, she burst into hysterical weeping.





CHAPTER XV.

MRS. FAIRLEIGH'S REQUEST.

IT was not until long, long afterwards that Malcombe knew that at that moment his love—at least his first passionate love—for Janet Fairleigh died. Another love might arise on its ashes, perhaps a better love; but the love that had torn his heart, the love that had shaken his strong nature to its depths, was dead. He had believed her perfect; on this night he saw her imperfections. His ideal Janet was dead. His Janet whom he idolised no longer existed. He was unaware of this at the time.

He did not mean to show her the contempt with which her low false pride filled him. He had no idea that it spoke so plainly in the look he gave her. His greatest conscious desire was to awaken her to a sense of shame, to save her from publicly disgracing herself any further. Her tears on the old man's neck rejoiced him; and instantly—still believing in his love for her, still considering her his own Janet—he began to make excuses for her to himself.

“She little guesses that Mrs. Byng's guests are laughing at her, not at her dear old father and

mother," was his inward comment. But the thought that it should be so filled him with bitterness. Still he was unaware that his love had received a death-blow. He little guessed that Janet's old power over him was gone. The loss, however, he had really sustained—and surely it was not a little loss, being nothing less than the hurling from its temple of his most cherished idol—manifested itself to-night in new feelings of tenderness for Douglas. He thought of him as he hurried home; and when he entered his sitting-room and saw that the child was not in bed, but had dropped asleep forgotten on the old sofa, he took him in his arms and kissed him tenderly. This was the first kiss of his own free-will and pleasure he had ever given the little fellow. The kiss awakened Douglas. He opened his eyes, and said in his solemn way, "Did you kiss me just now?"

"Yes, my little lad."

"Then, perhaps you are going to be fond of me?"

"Fond of you?" echoed Malcombe, rather uncomfortably. "Why, of course! you are my little brother."

"Oh! that's nothing," answered Douglas. "Some brothers don't love each other. I have read of things as bad as that."

"And you had made up your mind that I was one of those bad brothers, who do not love my own."

"I knew you did not care for me much, David."

"How could you possibly tell? I was never unkind."

"Oh, no! you were so kind. But I knew. Can't you tell when people are fond of you, David?"

"I suppose I can, my boy. But if you had that idea in your head about me, I cannot make out why you have looked so happy lately."

"Can't you, David?" looking a little shy. "Have you forgotten Mrs. Brand's dear little baby?"

"Not quite. You love that little dirty chap?"

"Oh, David! he can't help being dirty. Yes, I love him and he loves me."

"Well, my boy, I think I have good news for you. What will you give me if I tell you that somebody else loves you, besides Mrs. Brand's baby? What will you give for the news that you have found a place in your brother's old heart to night?"

"A real place, David?"

"Yes, my lad. David Malcombe never yet did things by halves."

Little Douglas's first answer to this was a great, speechless hug. Then he said, in his prim old-fashioned way, "You want me to give you something. I'd give you my love, but I've done that already, and I'd give you myself, but I've done that already. Oh! I know, I can try harder to be good."

"Just so, my lad; so you will give me my best reward. Try to be good now, so that you may be a brave man by-and-by; and now come to bed."

The next morning, before he had started on his daily round of teaching, Malcombe was much surprised by a visit from Mrs. Fairleigh.

"I don't want my old man to know nothing of it, Mr. Malcombe, sir, and I made bold to set off alone. I had a deal o' trouble to find the place,

and these Lunnon streets are fair enough to turn the head of the stoutest body, that they are."

"Well, sit down, Mrs. Fairleigh. You want me to help you, I suppose?"

"Why, that was what I was making so bold as to ask, sir. The fact is, sir, my old man and me, we both want Janey back on the farm with us. My old man have done nought but pine since the lass took it in her head to come to Lunnon. He has said to me, over and over, 'I wouldn't mind ef she was married, and, perhaps, we'd have a grand-bairn, by and by; but to have her a-lowering herself and a-teaching in Lunnon—her as has no call to earn money, but might live at home in peace and plenty—why, 'tis fair enough to hanger us both.' My old man, he fair pines, and I'm lonely, too; though, I must say as Janey wor a bit masterful in the dairy, but at last, when she never come a-nigh us all through the summer, my old man, he said: 'We'll go up to Lunnon, Peggie, and see our bairn, and maybe 'twill warm her heart, and she'll come home wid us.' Well, Mr. Malcombe, sir, when she cried last night, the old man wor fain to laugh, he wor so pleased; and he says to me, says he, 'The lass have a soft place in her heart, and we'll bring her back with us, sure and safe.' But this morning, when we both axed her, she said 'No, she could not and would not.' She said it gentle-like enough, for Janey is never one to give back saucy words; but for all that, no one could move her—no, not her father's tears, for I will say as he put his old head down on the table and cried, Mr. Malcombe. So then I says to myself, 'I'll go, unknown

to no one, and talk to Mr. Malcombe,' for she seemed to have a liking for you once, sir. Indeed, my old man and me, we did think as you two was sweethearting, and that's the truth."

Malcombe coloured.

"We cannot marry," he said, "but I think I can promise you, Mrs. Fairleigh, that I and your daughter still like each other enough, to be a little influenced by what each would say to the other."

"And that wor what I wor hoping, sir; and you 'll speak to Janey?"

"Yes, I will promise to speak to her. I fear, however, she is much attached to her present situation. I know Mrs. Byng thinks her an excellent governess. I cannot agree with you, Mrs. Fairleigh, in thinking that she has at all lowered herself by teaching."

"Oh! sir, and she's the very first of her family, and she that might bide in peace and plenty at home, and learn her books, for I can manage my own dairy. Well, well, what 'ud her aunts say? I hopes as it 'ull never get to the ears of her aunts that Janey is lowered to a teacher body."





CHAPTER XVI.

HOW MALCOMBE PLEADED MRS. FAIRLEIGH'S CAUSE.

VERY great was the delight of the Elf when, one morning about a week after the events recorded in the last chapter, Malcombe sent for her, and asked her to come with him and Miss Fairleigh that afternoon to see his little brother.

"I'll take him something so nice," said Flora; and while Miss Fairleigh got ready, and Malcombe waited below, she rummaged amongst her most treasured possessions.

She was a generous child, and she soon selected a large parcel of what she liked best; her Noah's ark, her swimming doll, these, though costly toys, were parted with gladly, but she had a moment's struggle over a very beautiful waxen baby, oh! so much loved and so like a real baby. Should she give this darling treasure up? Need she? As she hesitated, Janet came into the room.

"See, Miss Fairleigh," she exclaimed, "he shall have this, and this, and this. But need I part with my darling, precious Molly Bawn?"

"Who for, my dear?" asked Janet.

"Why, for that sweet little Douglas."

"No, certainly, Flora; you are taking him a great deal as it is."

"But, Miss Fairleigh, Mr. Malcombe says that when we give things away we should always let them be things we care for. Now I am tired of all these toys, but I love my Molly Bawn."

"When did Mr. Malcombe tell you that, Flora?"

"Oh! not to me, it was to Podge. It was one day when poor Podge felt so sad about being lame, and Mr. Malcombe quite gave him a little sermon: I do hate most sermons, but I can listen to Mr. Malcombe, because he always looks, well, so *eager*. He said to Podge, 'You love God, don't you?' And Podge said, 'Yes, of course he did;' then Mr. Malcombe said, 'Well, Edgar'—he always says Edgar in such a nice voice—'God wants a proof of your love. He knows you would very much like to walk and jump about like Flora there. Well, you see you can't, and God wants you to give up your will to Him in this matter, and not to be unhappy about it; that will be a very noble thing to give to God, and God loves noble boys.' I did not quite understand what it all meant, Miss Fairleigh, but Edgar did, and his face grew so bright, and then, I mean since then, he has been so patient; and 'tis just because I remember what a very hard thing Podge has given up that I can't bear to take only the toys I don't care for to dear little Douglas."

"Take him the doll," said Janet, in a muffled, half-choked voice. Little Flora bundled it up and ran downstairs, and then they set off.

On the way Flora chatted to Malcombe. Child-like, she boasted of the self-sacrifice she had exercised. He answered simply, "You will have your reward in the pleasure you will give to Douglas."

Then he turned the conversation. He was not a man to bestow lightly either praise or blame ; but little Flora looked more than satisfied.

Douglas was expecting them, and sat primly on the sofa, dressed in his Sunday best ; he felt painfully shy and ill at ease. Janet gave him a stiff greeting, but the Elf flew to him, began to chatter volubly, and opening her treasures the two children retired into a corner. From there Malcombe and Janet heard bursts of merriment and exclamations of delight. In three minutes they were perfectly at home. Janet, even when prejudiced in a child's favour, had not a gracious manner at first. For this child she certainly felt no love, and Douglas, after her cold shake-hands, never gave her another thought. She stood at the far end of the room all alone, for Malcombe had gone to speak to Mrs. Brand about a little repast with which he meant to entertain his guests. For this opportunity she would have given a great deal a short time ago, for she could study at her leisure this creature who had come between her and her happiness ; this usurper, who shared Malcombe's board, home, and heart. Now, however, that the longed-for time had come, she scarcely looked at Douglas ; she stood with her back to the children, trying hard to keep back the tears which would fill her eyes. She was feeling very miserable ; she was realising as she had never realised yet all she had lost. But her misery was visiting her softly, in the form of tears, not with the old hard tension of heart and brain. The moment Malcombe re-entered the room Flora flew up to him with an eager request.

"May Douglas and I go up to his bedroom to put Molly Bawn to bed? She's so sleepy."

Malcombe gave her leave; and, dragging all their toys after and with them, the two children vanished. Thus Malcombe and Janet were alone.

"What do you think of him?" asked Malcombe, drawing a chair forward for her. As he spoke he wondered at his own calmness. Janet wondered too, wondered greatly; but her wonder was caused by a kind of agonised fear that her agitation would master her—that she could not control her voice to speak in the guarded tones which propriety demanded. After a moment's silence, she said, "You cannot expect me to care very much for him."

Malcombe was silent. When next he spoke it was to deliver her mother's message. He did this slowly and with diffidence, for he felt that if Janet yielded to his request it would only be because it was his. This would seem to establish a fresh tie between them, and was this wise? At the time, however, he had found it impossible to refuse the importunate desire of the mother. He pleaded her cause now, but perhaps not too warmly.

As he had expected, Janet said in reply that she could not leave London.

"But, if your old father is really pining and sad, you are not the Janet Fairleigh I knew at Home Farm if you willingly make your old father unhappy."

"I do not willingly make him unhappy," answered Janet. "But you are right in your first supposition: I am not the Janet you knew at Home Farm."

"Ah!" said Malcombe, with a cry of pain, startled out of all prudence by this confession; "then I have injured you."

"Your desertion has injured me sorely. I am growing very hard."

"Janet, could I help it? God only knows how I have suffered."

"You have not suffered as I have; for you have not day after day been losing sight of the good. But don't let us talk of this; only please do not ask me to return to Home Farm."

"I have no right to ask you anything. But are you not more unhappy in London? Does it not pain you to meet me?"

"It gives me torture, but at the same time satisfaction. I cannot do without it."

"And yet even this pleasure you have only had twice all the months you have been with Mrs. Byng."

"You are mistaken. I have only spoken to you to-day and once before, but I have often seen you. I go every Sunday to the church you worship at. I don't pray; I go there to look at you. Hitherto I took good care that you should not see me."

"Janet! this is terrible. I am ruining your life."

"Not altogether. I feel best when I am near you—when I see you. I was never a very amiable girl, Mr. Malcombe, never, never. But during that happy, happy time at Home Farm, I felt that I might grow good; I felt that you could make me good. Oh!" she added, suddenly losing all self-control, and bursting into tears, "Why did you

make me love you and then give me up? I might have been so good as your wife, I might have gone to God, by and by. Oh, I feel hard now, so very, very hard."

"My poor, poor child, you wring my heart. You know I longed to marry you; you know I would have married you only too gladly, but for Douglas; you would not ask me to desert Douglas?"

"You would marry me now but for Douglas?" said Janet, looking up.

"Yes."

For a moment longer she covered her face with her hands. Then, wiping her eyes, said, in her ordinary tones, "You have done what is right. I suppose you have; I try to believe it. It was very hard, but you could not desert the little boy. As long as you have Douglas you must not think of me. Only don't ask me to go away from London. Let me stay near you; what little good is left in me is stirred when I see you."

"I shall not often see you, Janet; it would not be wise for you."

"But you will not ask me to go away?"

"No, I have no right to do so. But Janet"—

"Yes."

"You say we are divided. You are right, we are. But there can be a broader division; such a division can come between man and wife."

"Mr. Malcombe, what do you mean?"

"I mean, Janet, that I cannot do without God: can you?" Janet shuddered, but said nothing; and Douglas and Flora returning at that moment, her opportunity was gone.



CHAPTER XVII.

THE TEMPTATION.

ON their way home Janet was silent; she made no effort to entertain Flora, she did not even try to listen to the ceaseless chatter of the little girl. In short the guard she usually kept over her face and manner was for the time laid aside. It so happened that Flora never noticed her silence, but whether she had or not would have made little difference to Janet then. When they reached home she went to her own room and locked her door. In a short time Flora shouted to her that the school-room tea was ready, but Janet said she wanted nothing, and did not wish to be disturbed. This again was contrary to all the etiquette of governess life, but Janet, generally so particular in fulfilling all the conditions of what she sometimes called her servitude, cared nothing about the matter to-night.

It was November now, and already the short hours of daylight had given place to darkness. Janet lit her gas, drew the curtains before the windows, and sat down opposite a cheerful fire. She cared nothing either for the warmth or the cheerfulness. This putting of her room to rights was *done mechanically*; perhaps also with an undefined

idea of preventing the intrusion of the housemaid by and by.

"And now I must fight it out," she said aloud.

These were the thoughts which were clamouring for the victory. Two thoughts very contrary the one to the other. The first said, "If Douglas is not there I can still be his wife." The other answered, solemnly, "What good will that do you? even as his wife you can be divided, for he cannot do without God."

Janet knew perfectly to-night that she must choose between Malcombe and God; that, brave, true Christian man as he was, she could only win him through sin. Any distinct form of sin had not yet presented itself to her, but she had a shuddering, terrible conviction that if she yielded to the temptation Satan would help her, and show her some way of getting rid of Douglas. She knew this without dwelling very vividly upon it, for just then she was struggling, poor feeble, tempted soul, to follow the good. What she had said to Malcombe was very true. When in his presence she had always felt a leaning towards the pure and true; he awakened the best that was in her. She was very fresh from her interview with him now, and though her whole heart longed for him with a terrible aching pain, yet she felt only too vividly that they might be married and yet be miserable. He, following God Who was sinless, would surely, day by day, be passing in spite of himself, however warmly he loved her, from her who was so full of sin. For she knew she could only win him through sin, and that sin must be hidden, must never be con-

fessed, and so never forgiven. Was not this life better than that? She was miserable now, but might she not go mad then? It was very strange, it was almost prophetic, the clearness with which she felt herself able to look into the future to-night. That future showed itself as fearful; that future could not tempt her; aye, most truly the temptation did not lie there, it lay nearer. She read the distant future aright, but there was the immediate—the happy time of betrothal, the bliss of early married life. This might come, this surely would come. Such joy must be hers, when first she really felt that Malcombe belonged to her, that she must forget her sin. It would return to torture her by and by, but surely for a short time her cup of bliss would be full. This month, this two months, became her temptation. For them she was willing to give up eternity, or—was she willing? Malcombe's influence was good. Suppose she let him lead her by the unseen spiritual guidance? Suppose she gave up the brief earthly paradise? Suddenly she sprang to her feet.

“I will not decide to-night,” she said to herself; “to-morrow will be Sunday. I will go to his church and see him there. Perhaps, when I go to church and look at him, I shall be able to pray, and the temptation will grow less. Yes, I know well what is right, but I am too weak to decide to-night.”

Then she unlocked her door, and went into the school-room to Flora and Edgar. The next day arose without light; a dense London fog, yellow, thick, dreadful, kept the streets in darkness. Can there be anything more depressing than a London

fog? Janet shivered as she opened her eyes. At the school-room breakfast Mrs. Byng sent up a message that Flora was not to go to church, and a request that Miss Fairleigh would also stay at home. Janet, however, returned a reply that no fog could harm her; that she knew her way perfectly, and that she would rather go. She put on her waterproof cloak, and setting off in good time, left the house. She went to Malcombe's church, took her accustomed seat in one of the free pews, and almost prayed that he might soon come. His influence for good was not so potent this morning, but she fully expected that his presence would revive it. Poor tempest-tossed soul—feeling her own weakness so much; dreading her own too near fall, and yet trusting to an arm of flesh to save her; trusting to this, with the God of all the earth so near. The service at last commenced, and Janet stood up when the others did.

“ Oh, God! our help in ages past,
Our trust for years to come,”

sang the congregation. Janet heard the words, and felt a dim possibility suggested by them, but she was watching for Malcombe too intently to follow it out. Why did not he come? He was never so late before; the fog would not keep him from coming to worship God, that idea was absurd. Suddenly she remembered that she had told him of her coming to church to see him. Was this the reason he stayed away to-day? Could this be the reason? when she had almost pleaded with him for these short glimpses as she would plead for the good influence of her life! Oh! was it possible

that he meant in future to attend another church? that he deliberately resolved that they should not meet? Janet felt she could not bear this. As the service proceeded she became more and more angry, more and more miserable; and when she at last left the church she knew well that she had not offered up one true prayer, that the good was far receding from her vision and the bad drawing near.

As she hurried home the fog was thicker than ever. It seemed to get into her lungs and almost choke her. She walked quickly, but presently found that she had missed a familiar turning; in short, that she had lost her way. There was no cab-stand in sight, no cab visible anywhere. She stood still for a moment, irresolute, rather frightened. Suddenly she felt some one touch her sleeve. A man had come up to her; he was doffing his hat and saying politely, "I fear you have lost your way, Miss. Can I help you? I know this part of the town very well; I will see you home with pleasure, Miss."

"Thank you very much," answered Janet. They were standing under a lamp-post, and she could see his face. She gave a great start. He was the railway porter, Maddon. It takes but a swift instant for thoughts to flash through the human mind. "Did I not know I should be helped," thought the wretched girl almost despairingly. She felt her heart beating and the colour coming into her face as she turned to walk by Maddon's side.

"I have seen you before, Miss," he said. "You are the young lady who I helped to get a cab at

Paddington, some time ago ; well, I am out of that berth now."

"And I know you," replied Janet, suddenly and desperately. "You are the man who some years ago married a Mrs. Malcombe."

It was a shot fired at random, but the aim found its mark ; the man's shallow face grew pale.

"What do you mean, Miss ?" he said.

"I know your history," answered Janet, now quite calm and composed. "I could tell all that part of it to you. I don't want to give you back your wife, but I can do something else. I have no doubt you want money."

"Of course I do, Miss ; I'm poor, I'm almost starving. But I must know what this means ; you, a strange young lady, meet me in the street and talk to me about—about—I must know what it means."

"It means that if you will help me, I will help you," said Janet.

"I must know more about it," answered the man.

"First, tell me, am I right in my conjecture ?"

"My name is Maddon," said the man ; "that part is right enough."

"And some years ago you married a widow—a widow of the name of Malcombe."

"Well, Miss, as I said before, I don't see that I have any call to tell you who I married."

"And yet you said you wanted money."

"That's true enough. I have no money. I'm as miserably poor a beggar as ever lived."

"If you will tell me your story, and if I find out

you are the man I thought you were, I can help you to get money. Of course, I tell you frankly, I can do this because I want you to help me."

"'Tis fair enough that you should say so, Miss. It makes it sound more likely like. 'Tis not to common sense that you should take an interest in a poor lost beggar like me if you had not an object to gain by it."

"I have an object," said Janet.

"Well, Miss, I'll think it over. I'll think of what you say for a bit. When may I bring you an answer?"

"When you have decided," said Janet.

"I'll have decided 'aye' or 'no' by this time to-morrow, Miss. Where can I see you again?"

"I cannot see you at this hour, I shall be engaged—but later. I sometimes go for a walk alone. Shall I arrange to meet you, say, in Paddington Green?"

"That'll be a likely place enough, Miss. I'll be in the Green to-morrow at three o'clock. Will that time suit you?"

"Yes; I shall be there by three. Do not come any farther now, I know where I am. Thank you for putting me in my way again."





CHAPTER XVIII.

YIELDING TO THE TEMPTATION.

THERE is truth in the old saw "that it is the first step which costs." Janet came home self-possessed and calm. Her indecision, which had made her so miserable the night before, had left her; the fight was over, the conflict no longer raging within. Her thoughts wandered on to the hour when victory would be hers. After their great depression her spirits rose; she felt a terrible false happiness as she sat with her little pupil that Sunday afternoon. That night too she slept well; no uneasy dreams disturbed her. She awoke refreshed the next morning, and at the appointed hour, full of self-possession, started off to meet Maddon. She had no doubt whatever as to the frame of mind in which she should find Maddon; her own plans were well arranged. The man, with his slouching gait and ill-looking face, was waiting for her.

"You have decided to help me?" said Janet, looking keenly into his face.

"Well, Miss, I have no objection to a trifle of money, that is if what you want done is nothing very desperate."

"No, I am not likely to ask you to do anything desperate. Now, will you answer my questions?"

"Ask them, please, Miss."

"Did you marry about ten years ago a widow of the name of Malcombe?"

"I have no objection to say, Miss, as I had such a party to wife."

"Oh! and you shortly afterwards deserted her?"

"That's putting it rather strong, Miss, if you'll excuse me. I wouldn't use them words, Miss, if I was you. I had to leave my wife for a short spell to try and get employment."

"But you never returned to her?"

"I looked for her, Miss. I went again to the lodgings where I had left her, but she was gone, without leaving an address. What was I to do?"

"I don't know, nor do I care. You never heard anything more about her?"

"No, Miss; but I guess as you has tidings."

"Yes; I know what happened after you left her. She had to go to the Middlesex Hospital. In the lying-in ward of that hospital she died, leaving a son behind her."

"A son!" echoed the man.

"Yes, her son and yours. Does that fact move you at all?"

"Well, Miss, perhaps we'd better not talk about feelings. Is the child living?"

"He is alive, and it is about him I wish to speak to you. You know that your wife had another son?"

"Yes, Miss; I am not likely to forget. A great big surly chap, he was."

"The little boy is now living with this other son. I have a reason, which we need not enter on, for

wishing him to be taken away from him. It is in that matter I want you to help me; are you willing to receive your own child?"

"Well, Miss, I don't want to say as I am an unnatural parent; but the truest kindness is to leave the boy where he won't starve. At least, so it seems to me."

"If with you he need not starve. I will give you money if you will manage to remove your son, and in such a way that his brother cannot find him."

"How much money will you give me, Miss?"

"How much will you require?"

"I'll wash my hands of the whole job, Miss, under a thousand pounds."

"I believe I can manage that sum for you," answered Janet, after a short pause.

After that they talked for a long time, arranging many things, and discussing many possibilities. Before they parted the wicked scheme was far advanced. That night, before going to bed, Janet sat down and wrote the following letter to her old father:—

My dear Father,

You have often told me to apply to you if I wanted money. I happen just now to have a little secret plan in my head which, if it succeeds, will do much good, and make many people happy. Dear father, to carry out my plan I want money; I want a thousand pounds. This seems a very large sum to ask for, but it is really the exact sum that I require. I think you once told me that you had money put away; if so, you can spare me that sum. You will be glad by-and-by, as I hope then to give up teaching, which I know is a great pain to you and my mother. If you cannot let me have the money, of course there is nothing

more to be said, and things must continue in the old groove. Do not fret about refusing my request, only let me know at once. I hope to spend Christmas with you and mother in the old home.

Your affectionate daughter,

JANET FAIRLEIGH.

Three days after a cheque for the amount demanded, with some loving words from the old father, was forwarded to Janet. She felt no emotion of love for the generous gift, no remorse for the deceit she had practised ; all feeling seemed dead within her, except the passionate desire which was driving her into such dark depths of sin.





CHAPTER XIX.

THE BABY'S LITTLE LIFE.

IT so happened that about this time Malcombe fell ill. He had taken no holiday during the summer ; devoting the time of his regular pupils' vacations to getting forward in their studies some lads who could not afford to pay, and who, consequently, more than most, required to live by their brains. These lads he had helped through some tough study, and had found much pleasure in the work. But, unwittingly, he had ill-used his own brain, and it was now taking its revenge upon him. He was not very ill, but for a fortnight and more he found it absolutely impossible to study, either for himself or in the behalf of others. The simplest books became full of indistinct meanings. He had to lie all day on the sofa in his gloomy lodgings, longing for a great breath of the sea-air, but this he could not afford. The doctor who came to see him said he only needed a few days of absolute rest ; and in a fortnight he was better, and able to resume his duties. Little Edgar Byng noticed when his tutor returned to him how white and ill he looked. But Malcombe soon declared that he felt as well as ever. And his slight illness

seemed to have passed away, leaving no fruit behind except an increased love for Douglas.

Douglas had been as happy as child could be when he sat by his brother's side and helped to nurse him. And Malcombe found that he could listen to the innocent child's pretty thoughts and fancies when other things were too much for his tired brain. He could not bear Douglas to go out of his sight, and he even allowed him to have Mrs. Brand's baby up to play with in his presence. He found much pleasure in watching the perfect love and friendship between these two. To Janet, also, he gave many thoughts. Indeed, Janet had been, more than he himself knew, the cause of his illness. Their interview on the day when he took her to see Douglas had given him the keenest pain. It was now only too plain that she was injured—injured by him. She had herself told him so; and it had not needed her bitter words to convince him that she was not the Janet he used to love. Injured, and by him! by his deed! He could scarcely have been the man he was, devoting himself ever to the good of others, without feeling this keenly. He did feel it. He had also an uneasy intuition that he had done wrong. This intuition, however, was rather an undercurrent than an active thought.

On the first day of his resuming his duties at Mrs. Byng's, he met her. This meeting brought him some relief, for her manner was cold and expressionless, and he hoped that her regard for him was dying out. It showed but too plainly *how* his own sentiments had changed, when such

a thought could bring him pleasure. He knew nothing of the hopes that were buoying up Janet, hopes so strong and schemes so active that for the time all vivid feeling was suspended; suspended, not dead, lying full of life yet within that strange wayward heart, and biding its time.

One day, about a week after Malcombe's recovery, there came a trouble to little Douglas—there came to him the greatest trouble of his life; the first experience set actively before him that the young could die. He had seen his aunt pass away, and he had said to himself, "It is because she is very, very old; old people must die." He had read in his history books, too, of the death of the little Princes and others, but these had met their death by violence. It never occurred to him that death and little children could have anything in common.

There came an afternoon when Mrs. Brand sent up the baby as usual to play with Douglas. The baby was not cross, it never yet had been cross with Douglas; but as he clasped his little love in his arms, child as he was, he saw that there was something the matter.

By dint of hard and patient teaching, Douglas had taught the baby to gaze full into his face, open its mouth in the form of a bow, and say quite clearly the one word "boy."

Douglas loved the way the baby called him "boy" better than any other sound in the world. But to-day it would not speak; it would only rest its hot little face on Douglas's breast, and drop off into heavy slumber. Douglas was puzzled, for this was the hour for the baby's most active play.

This was the hour for "bo-peep" and a thousand other pretty games. It was, however, some consolation to sit quite still, holding the little warm living thing in his arms. And Douglas remained motionless, dreaming dreams of the future before himself and this baby, and seeing nothing of the black cloud already beginning to shut him out from the dearest delight of his little life. In an hour's time he carried down the baby, still sleeping heavily, to Mrs. Brand.

"Dear heart," exclaimed the mother, as she looked at him. "Aint he drowsy-like? I trust in heaven as it aint the fever as he's sickening for."

"What's fever?" asked Douglas, raising wide-open and innocent eyes.

"Lor, bless yer heart, dear lamb, don't yer know? Why 'tis what carries off heaps and heaps of people; off they goes like a snuff of a candle. And there's a deal of it near here just now."

"Do you mean," asked Douglas, "that it kills people? that it kills little children, little tiny children like him? Is that the meaning of carrying off?"

"Yes, my dear, that's the meaning—that's the meaning, true enough. But there, Douglas, for Heaven's sake don't go so pale; you'll be catching of it next. There, my dear, I wor only joking about the baby; he'll have his sleep out, and wake as pert as a cricket. You run upstairs, Douglas, and don't think nothing of what I said."

Douglas knew he must not linger in Mrs. Brand's room. He turned on his heel, and slowly mounted

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the stairs to his own and Malcombe's sitting-room. Having got there he sat down in the corner, where he had always played with the baby, and tried to think out the new and horrible idea suggested by Mrs. Brand's words.

It was true, then, little children died; the baby might die. As Mrs. Brand expressed it, the baby might catch the fever, and go out like the snuff of a candle. He knew that this would be quickly; if the baby died, he, Douglas, would see him no more. This idea he tried to grasp, but failed. He endeavoured to imagine what life would be to him without the baby. This he could not do; his thoughts would wander on to Mrs. Brand's later and more cheering words, "The baby will probably wake up as pert as a cricket." He was interrupted in his meditations by a knock at the door; he rose to open it. A shabby-looking man was standing without; this man asked for Malcombe. Douglas saw at a glance that he was a shabby man, though his dress was neat and even new. He said his brother was out, and did not ask the stranger in. The stranger, however, meant to effect an entrance. He said if the little boy had no objection he would wait for a few moments, in the hope that Malcombe would return. Douglas did not know how to forbid him to come in, though he told him that his brother would not come home for some hours. The man came in and talked; somehow he talked well. Douglas forgot his shabby face, drew near to him, asked questions, and became so much interested that he even forgot his anxiety about Mrs. Brand's baby. Presently the man asked why the child had

had been a time when she had regarded him as a burden, but that time was not to-day. Now, as she watched the little life going rapidly out, she would have given her own life to save him; as she saw death coming on with rapid strides, she would have covered the baby from the assaults of so grim a foe with her own body. She sat tearless, stunned, for she knew that the water was already rising to the baby's brain, and that he must soon die. Douglas, however, on the contrary, with no experience, was much comforted, and the terrible fear excited by Eliza Jane laid to rest, by the fact that the baby was asleep and looking much as usual, not hot and flushed like yesterday. He was afraid to speak and ask questions which must disturb a sleep so sweet and good, and he contented himself with softly stroking the round cheek of the baby, already growing white and cold. Suddenly, as he bent over him, the waking came; the blue eyes were opened wide. The baby saw Douglas, smiled as if in recognition, and said, more distinctly than he had ever done before, the one word he could utter, "boy." It was the only word he was ever to say on earth, and the little tongue had spoken it then for the last time. The next moment he was in strong convulsions. Poor Mrs. Brand screamed, and Douglas, trembling and in terror, ran out of the room. Oh! this was too dreadful! Why did not Eliza Jane come with the doctor? He ran wildly down to the street-door to look for her. She was not in sight, but just then, approaching the house, was the man whom Douglas had yesterday pronounced—he did not know why—shabby. Now a

great cry of joy broke from his lips. This man had come in time; this man could save the baby. He flew to meet him and caught his hand eagerly.

"Oh! come in, come in!" he gasped; "the baby is ill, ill. The baby is very, very ill. Oh! please come in at once, and save it. You said you knew of something which would cure people when they have fever—the baby has fever."

"I will save the baby," said the man, "but I cannot come back. If you will come with me I will take you to a shop and buy the right medicine, and you can take it back to the baby, and when the baby drinks it, it will not die."

"Oh! thank you, thank you!" said Douglas. "Please let us come at once; the baby is dreadfully ill."

"If so," said the man, holding Douglas's hand tightly, "we had better get into a cab."

As he spoke he whistled for a hansom, and the two got in and drove away. No one who knew Douglas had seen him go.





CHAPTER XX.

THE SEARCH.

IN half-an-hour after Douglas went out the baby died. He had gone to that Paradise where other little babies, joyful and sin-free, would meet him, and the good Shepherd of the lambs would lead him and his little brothers and sisters always beside the green pastures and still waters. For the baby, therefore, it was well. He would doubtless have had a hard lot down here, and even Douglas's love could not have saved him from the adversities of the very poor; but Mrs. Brand and Eliza Jane wept sore over the little corpse, and though they had often complained of the trouble he gave them in life, they longed with a great unsatisfied longing to have that trouble back again now. The dead baby was instantly invested in a halo of love and virtue to them both.

"Aint he a real perky smile?" sobbed Eliza Jane.

"He wor a sweet 'un! God bless him," said the mother. "'Ere, 'Lizar Jane, 'ere's a penny, run out and buy a bunch of wi'lets to put in 'is little 'and."

Why is it we don't love the living as we love the dead? Many a slap had Eliza Jane inflicted on

the baby in life; now, when he knew nothing of her love, when her affection could do him no good whatever, she would have crawled on her hands and knees to serve him.

It was not until quite late in the evening that Douglas was missed. Mrs. Brand had gone up to Malcombe's room to ask him to come down to see the baby, looking like a little waxen image with the violets in his tiny hand. She came upstairs prepared to draw a pathetic picture, and to be comforted by the sympathy of a child's sorrow, and she found emptiness. This instantly alarmed her, for she knew Douglas never ventured out alone, and certainly Malcombe had not come in. Then she remembered the look of horror on the child's face as he witnessed the baby's convulsions, and he then had rushed from the room. Mrs. Brand wondered. Could he in his turn have gone into the street, and so got lost? As she meditated, Malcombe came in; she told her story. Malcombe instantly started off to the nearest police stations to describe the child; it was too soon for him to feel any real alarm. Having done all he could, he returned home to wait and watch. He watched all night, his uneasiness growing with each lengthening hour. In the morning he repaired to Scotland Yard, and put the case into the hands of a skilled detective; then he went to the Byngs. He was a little earlier than usual, and he met Janet in the school-room. This appeared to be accidental, as this was before his accustomed hour for arriving; but Janet, knowing what had happened yesterday, had schooled herself to meet him at once, and

guessed that he would break through conventional hours in coming to-day.

Janet was alone when he entered. As she caught sight of his face, she could not help her own growing pale.

"Douglas is lost, Janet," he said, holding out his hand to her, but scarcely conscious that it was specially her he addressed.

"Lost!" she echoed feebly.

"Yes; I don't know how. He was very much attached to Mrs. Brand's baby; the poor little thing took fever and died yesterday. Douglas was in the room, and ran out of it dreadfully shocked and frightened. Mrs. Brand thinks he ran out of the house perhaps with the wild idea of looking for a doctor. This seems probable, but at any rate he must have lost his way, for he has not returned."

"Have you taken any steps to try to get him back?" asked Janet.

"Yes; I have taken every step. I went last night to all the police stations within reach, and this morning to Scotland Yard. The case is already put into the hands of a first-class detective, who is empowered to offer a reward, and to do everything that his skill will suggest."

"Then he will be found," said Janet, with a sickening fear in her heart that it might be so. She had all a country girl's dread of detectives, and had forgotten that, of course, Malcombe would resort to this means of search. "He will be found," she repeated, her lips growing white.

"I don't know; I am strangely fearful. But I

must not stay idling here. Will you tell the Byngs that I cannot give Edgar his tasks to-day? I must go and join in the search for the child myself."

"Stay!" said Janet, as he was preparing to leave the room; "did you say that Mrs. Brand's baby had died of fever?"

"Yes; and of a sort very prevalent among children, and very infectious."

"And you say Douglas played with this baby every day?"

"Yes; but do not keep me."

"Only for one moment. It occurs to me that I may be able to give you a clue. The child may have taken the infection of this dreadful fever. Some people get fever and become suddenly unconscious. He may have run into the street in his terror, and then dropped down unconscious. In that case he would be taken to some hospital; would it not be well to look for him there?"

"Yes, thank you, Janet," said Malcombe, "your suggestion is quite probable and worth following out."

"One moment," said Janet, suddenly, and as though driven to say what she did by an ungovernable impulse; "David, did—did you love that little boy very much?"

"Love him?" said Malcombe, "I love him, well, better I think than any one. Now I must go."

He never noticed her white lips and shaking hands, but ran downstairs intent on his search for Douglas, and his trouble at having lost him. Janet crept slowly and feebly, like one recovering from illness, to the shelter of her own room. She did

not give way when she got there, but she covered her face and groaned.

"In vain," she murmured; "his love gone already. All, all in vain! And yet it shall not be so. When we are engaged I will win back his love."





CHAPTER XXI.

NEARING THE GOAL.

JANET'S fears, however, that Douglas might be found, and so all her plans and trouble, all the depths of sin to which she had sunk, be thrown away, proved needless. Satan helps his own, and sometimes it surely seems that God's restraining hand is slackened, and so the wickedness of the wicked prospers. At any rate Douglas was not found. In vain Malcombe, the police-officers, the detectives, the advertising columns of many newspapers, joined in the search for the little boy; his sudden and mysterious disappearance remained as mysterious as ever. Malcombe had visited every hospital in London; not a stone in any possible and impossible direction did he leave unturned, but days passed into weeks, and weeks lengthened themselves into months, and no Douglas returned to lament the baby's vanished form in Mrs. Brand's old lodging-house.

After a time even Mrs. Brand ceased to speak of him, and Malcombe shut up his thoughts about the little lost brother in his own breast. He had come to the conclusion that Douglas was dead. He believed that the tender, loving child had met some

sudden and fearful street accident, such an accident as would alter him past all recognition. At one of the hospitals he had been shown the body of a child mangled beyond recognition. This child had been run over by a heavy dray on the afternoon that Douglas had disappeared. He had thought the poor little disfigured body too old to belong to his brother at the time, but gradually he had brought himself to believe that this dead child was Douglas. Malcombe was a strong man, blessed with strong nerves, absolutely free from nervous terrors; but strong as he was, the thought of Douglas, as he imagined he saw him last, brought with it fearful dreams, and such upbraiding did the tired brain give to the sensitive heart of the man, that he brought himself to believe that he alone and solely was to blame for his little brother's disappearance and terrible fate. He said nothing of his thoughts, but his face grew older and his hair more streaked with gray; he looked much over forty at this time, and had a stoop which belongs to old men.

And now again he fell ill—ill with that brain disorder which brings such torture to the victim. Again his books became an agony past enduring; again he was absolutely obliged to rest from study; again the doctors spoke of the necessity of change of air: but Malcombe would less than ever now be induced to leave London, as his sole shadowy hope of seeing Douglas again lay in the great city. Neither would he, for this reason, consent to go away from Mrs. Brand. And now, indeed, as he lay hour after hour on his sofa, unable to read—unable for the slightest exertion—hard thoughts came to

the man; thoughts cold, earthly, and dreadful; thoughts which had not visited him since the day when he had first known Graham. And he said to himself over and over, "Of what use is my life?" Lying there alone, through the weary hours, he began to think of his self-sacrificing and humble life as a failure. He forgot the widow's tears he had helped to wipe away, and the smiles he brought into many a sad little face. He forgot how many loved him, how many blessed God that they had ever known him. The hour was too dark, both within and without, for him just then to remember his own good works, or to derive comfort from them. After a time he began to doubt. The future, which had hitherto lured him up many a toilsome ascent, began to wax dim, then to die absolutely away. Was there, anywhere, any abiding city? Was there, anywhere, a place where Graham and he could meet? Was there, beyond and greater than these, anywhere, anywhere a place where he, a mortal man yet made in God's image, could see God and live? He began to believe in the old heathen philosopher's theory, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." And he began to regret that he had so wasted his time down here, the only life he knew of, the only life there might be after all, as to build himself no house of cards. Had Douglas been with him during his illness these dark hours of temptation might have been averted; for it is surprising how brightly the faith of a little child reflects itself on surrounding objects.

He had been absent from all his pupils for a fortnight, when one day he was interrupted, in the

midst of some very dark thoughts, by the entrance of little Flora Byng. She came in alone, ran up to him in child fashion, and kissed him.

"Oh! dear, dear Mr. Malcombe! how very, very bad you look. Oh! I do hope you are not going to die." Down plumped Flora on the floor and burst into tears.

It did Malcombe good to have to rouse himself to comfort her.

"Mother wants you to come and have a drive in the carriage," continued the little maiden. "Mother has sent the carriage for you, and Miss Fairleigh is in it, waiting below. Miss Fairleigh and I will just sit quite quietly by your side, and we will drive through the park. Now do get ready at once, for the day is lovely."

"I cannot come, Flora," answered Malcombe. "You must thank your mother for me. Thank her much for her kind thought; but I cannot drive to-day, my head is so uncomfortable that I can only lie quite still. Now go, dear, and have your pleasant drive while the sun shines."

"But Miss Fairleigh will be so sorry. Do you know that this morning, when we learned how very ill you were, she just burst out crying; she did, really. Edgar and I were surprised, as we never supposed she could be so soft. I told mother, and mother thought of sending the carriage for you and asking Miss Fairleigh to come too; now she will be disappointed."

Malcombe coloured.

"Thank them all for their kindness, Flora, and give my love to Edgar. I am only resting for a

few days; next week I hope to be with him again."

"Mr. Malcombe, I do wish you would teach me, too."

"My dear, you have your governess."

"Yes, of course, and I love her. But, somehow, I don't think there is any one quite like you. Podge is so different since you came. He used to fret so dreadfully, and now he is patient. He says, when I ask him, that it is because you have told him about God. Now I have always been told about God; but I don't think if I were like dear Podge I could be patient."

It was not in Malcombe's heart to read Flora any little lecture then. But a softness came about his eyes, and he felt some of the hard tension round his heart relax.

"My dear," he said, simply, "I thank you; now run down to Miss Fairleigh."

The next day he was visited, not by Flora, but by Janet herself. She came laden with beef-tea, jelly, and other delicacies made by Mrs. Byng's cook. Ill as Malcombe looked, Janet looked worse. She put aside, however, all startled inquiries he made as to her own health, and sitting down by him, broke the ice at once.

"You are killing yourself, David," she said.

Only once before in all her life she had called him by this name. But the unfamiliar sound passed by him now unnoticed; he was too much absorbed in trying to quiet, by his manner, her all too evident agitation.

"I am not killing myself," he answered. "I am

better to-day; next week I hope to be quite well."

"You do not know how you look," she said; "you, you shock me."

"I might return the compliment," he answered, perhaps not too wisely.

"Yes," answered Janet, "I am ill; I have had great trouble. But that is not the present question. I can keep up, and women don't break down as men do. Mr. Malcombe, I have come here to-day to talk about you. Will you go down to my father's farm for a little? Will you, because you were happy there once with me, and because I ask you?"

Malcombe was touched.

"I was happy there, and with you, Janet," he said, "but I cannot go there now, because I have still a shadowy hope of finding Douglas."

"You will never find him," she said, her manner changing.

"You are right, the hope is without foundation. Douglas is dead."

"Then why kill yourself here, when it can do him no good?" Then, suddenly changing her voice and manner, "Oh! how unhappy you have made me!"

"I know it, Janet. I have much to ask you to forgive, but do not heap my sins upon me to-day, for I am weak."

"I have no sins to heap; you did right, you were noble; I rebelled fiercely, but I always thought that you were right; but now, now you can save me, you can take away the pain that is killing me."

"How?"

"Must I tell you how?"

"You mean that I can marry you?"

"You said you would but for Douglas. Douglas is dead."

"I did say so, Janet."

"Then it is a thing of the past?"

"Do you wish for it?"

"Do I? Do I wish for heaven? That would be heaven."

For a moment, for two moments, Malcombe was silent.

"What," he said then, "what if I tell you that the old passionate feeling, the feeling which gave me such agony last year, is gone? Could you marry me without it?"

"Yes, for you are still David Malcombe, and the feeling can revive."

"But what if it does not?"

"I will take the risk."

Malcombe held out his hand.

"Then come to me, dear," he said, "and let me try what all tenderness will do to make up for the sorrow I have brought into your life."





CHAPTER XXII.

WON !

“ **W**ON ! Won at last ! ”

So said Janet Fairleigh, as she lay down on her bed that night ; so she said, while every pulse beat and every nerve trembled.

“ At last he is mine. I have not sinned and suffered in vain. He is mine !—the man I love, the man I worship, the man who can awake in me what no other soul in all the world can awake—he is mine ! Now I can be good, now I can be happy ! ”

So she said, and she tried to calm the excitement of a joy which was almost too joyful. “ How little I thought this morning what a day could bring forth,” she said to herself. “ To-day, this very morning, I felt almost in despair ; and now, and now ”—

Yes, this was her hour of victory. In this hour her sin looked small, and her great joy almost overpowered her. She had won a man poor, obscure, a man with no earthly position, nothing to give her, neither money nor fame. For this man she had suffered sore and sinned deeply. For this man she had put her very soul in jeopardy. But

to-night, so great, so noble did this man she had won appear to her, that she thought all she had done, all she had suffered, well worth the prize. But had she really won Malcombe? Long ago—it seemed very long ago to-day—he had loved her. But had he said one word of love as they talked together this afternoon? Had not she, rather unwittingly, for she had almost been driven by the strength of her feelings to say what she did, so put matters to him that he could not but offer to marry her. Yes! she knew it. But she did not doubt that the love would come back. She never guessed that Malcombe had loved an ideal Janet; that the real Janet Fairleigh was the last woman to command his reverence, to enter and reign in his heart. The *real* Janet; ah! did he really know her? Could he ever know her, he must hate her. But already even he had caught glimpses of the true woman, and those faint glimpses had killed the fervour of his love. To win him at all, however, to-night, was good to the hungry and passionate heart of the eager girl. And she went to sleep happy, forgetting Douglas and everything but that she belonged at last, at long and weary last, to David Malcombe.

Yes! there certainly comes a time in life when conscience slumbers, when we forget, in our own selfish delight, the sins we sin and the victims who suffer for us. That night, while Janet slumbered, a child wept sore.

In an attic-room in the extreme East End of London, Douglas sat and cried, he had cried at intervals all through the long day, for all day

long he had remained locked up in the attic. But now a peculiar terror was coming on—a nightly recurring terror, and in the prospect of it his tears flowed fast and bitterly. For now, at any moment, his father would return drunk—either dead-drunk, which was the best Douglas could hope, or actively drunk, in which latter case he would be cruel, very cruel to the child. Sometimes on these occasions he beat him. Always he hurled at him bad and evil words, and the words were almost worse to Douglas than the beating. He had gone through a dreadful time during these last six months, a time in which every evil which can torture a delicate and sensitive nature seemed to fall to his share. He had seen very low life. He had witnessed much cruelty. He had heard bad words. Curses and oaths had fallen on his unaccustomed ear. But the worst trouble had been the loss of Mrs. Brand's baby, and the terrible belief that Malcombe had forgotten him; for surely, if his brother remembered him at all, he would have found him before now—have found him and taken him out of his captivity.

He was six months in his new prison now, and he had grown in a measure accustomed to his fate. He had ceased to expect Malcombe to come in at any moment. In a measure, and this was truly sad for so young a child, he had ceased to hope. But children soon accustom themselves even to the saddest surroundings, and it already seemed to Douglas that he had lived a lifetime in Cooper's Alley, that he had always listened to the voices of scolding women, and heard the curses of bad

and drunken men. His life with Malcombe, his life with his aunt, seemed far away and like a dream. Now and then he had even smiled in his new home; and he had already made friends with a little lame girl who lived in the cellar of the house. This lame child was the one bright spot in his little life. He could visit her now and then, and he spent many hours of each day with her. It never occurred to him to run away. He could never have found his own way back to Malcombe; besides, his father explained that he was his property, and that he could claim him by the law of the land. Douglas believed his father without understanding him in the least. Neither did he understand the new relationship which the words father and son signified. The word "father" awoke no feeling whatever in his breast. He did not know why he should love this shabby man, who had deceived him so cruelly, and taken him away from all the joy of his little life. Yes! his father was unkind; his father was cruel, and he did not love him. But there came moments when he had feelings strong and bitter about him. Those were the moments when the man was drunk. Douglas at these times regarded him with a horrified pity. His aunt was a strict Calvinist. Such a woman could not quite leave hell out of her teaching. She had spoken to Douglas about hell. She had taught him a list of the sins that sent people to hell. She had described the place of torment in glowing colours, and she had made Douglas learn the solemn verses of denunciation by heart. Douglas remembered that this supreme punish-

ment awaited drunkards; he remembered it night after night as he watched for his father, as he looked at him in his drunken slumber. His terror for his father's future at these times was far greater than his present terror for himself. He was always trying to summon up courage to tell his father of the fate hanging over his head, but hitherto his lips had failed to obey his heart.

To-night, as usual, he lay and trembled. His father was later than ever. A bad sign; he would come in more helplessly drunk. Douglas, with his vivid imagination, lying awake in the dark attic, seemed to see a sword hanging over his father's head. It seemed to him that a very angry God held this sword, and that at any moment, wearied beyond patience, He would let it drop.

"Oh, God! don't let my father go to hell to-night," he sobbed, in a terror of childish supplication.

Suddenly he heard a step. His little heart almost stood still to listen. The step belonged to his father. He entered, holding a candle in his hand. This last was a good sign, as when very drunk he could not steady a candle, and generally stumbled up to bed in the dark. Douglas sat up and looked at him. Oh, joyful sight!—sight almost past belief!—his father was quite sober. Douglas instantly believed that God had heard his prayer. He called the man's name timidly.

"Father!"

Maddon approached the bedside. "Well, young 'un, why are you awake?" He spoke quite kindly. Douglas answered by a faint smile. But now, as

the man undressed and prepared to lie down by his side, a new thought came to trouble him. God had heard his prayer, and prevented his father from going to hell to-night. Then surely, surely, He meant him to warn him. He meant him, Douglas, to tell him of the sword and the day of vengeance. Here was his chance, here was his opportunity. Douglas found his heart beating hard and fast, for this task sent to him by God seemed a fearful one. Could he do it? Could his lips frame the dreadful words? Might not his father in his great anger kill him? And yet would it not be better for him to die than for his father to go to hell? Suddenly he remembered the refrain of the sweet old song his aunt used to sing to him—

*Douglas, Douglas,
Faithful and true.*

Those who were faithful had crowns by-and-by. As his father lay down he found his voice. "Father, are you very sleepy?"

"No, lad, not particularly. I've been losing money—worse luck."

"Father, did you ever know a man who went to hell?"

"A man who went to hell? Confound the boy, what does he mean?"

Douglas's heart beat faster.

"Do you know what kind of place it is, father?"

"No; and I hope I never may. Get out of the dismal, Douglas."

"'Tis a place where people burn always," continued Douglas, who was growing more courageous,

“where they burn for ever and ever and ever. May I tell you a verse out of the Bible about the people who go there, father ?”

Maddon was too amazed to make any reply, too amazed and also too fearful. He was a weak, superstitious man, and Douglas's words had filled him with a vague terror.

“This is the verse,” continued the child; “’tis all in the Bible. ‘But the fearful and unbelieving, and the abominable and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death.’”

No reply whatever from Maddon. He turned round and stared up at the stars. And Douglas thanked God; for now that his father knew, he surely would not go to hell.





CHAPTER XXIII.

A NEAR SHAVE FOR JANET.

MADDON lay awake all night. He soon perceived that Douglas was sleeping, but he continued to lie on his back and gaze up at the fast fleeting clouds and the stars, as they could be seen from his attic-window. Douglas's words had come to him with the terrible force of a prophecy, and he trembled; he was a weak man and a coward. He shivered as he recalled the verse which the child had solemnly repeated. Douglas had purposely omitted the word drunkard from his catalogue of sins; he felt that his father might supply that word himself. At any rate, he could not feel brave enough to speak of what he knew his father was, to that father, to-night; but he did not know that other sins, and more than one, in that dread category would fit Maddon's case. All liars! Maddon had been a liar from his cradle to the present moment. To tell a lie meant no more to him than speaking truth would to another man. He had come to such a pass that, whenever possible, he concealed the truth, just because the habit of telling lies had grown both safer and pleasanter to him; and now, all liars—he could

not deny that he was a liar—all liars had their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. Maddon cowered; he began to fancy that he already felt the flames of the pit. In very truth he *was* tasting hell, the real hell-fire, that night. This weak man had never cared for God, and now the presence of God was terrifying him. He began to try to think of some way of appeasing this angry God. His thoughts turned to repentance. He would lead a new life, he would cease to drink, he would cease to gamble; above all, he would be true at last in his old age, for he knew he was growing old. He would be true and just in all his dealings.

These resolves comforted him, and towards morning he fell asleep. Douglas was up and dressed when he awoke. He was less frightened when he awoke, consequently his resolves were fainter. Still he made up his mind to keep quite sober to-day; to avoid the card-tables, and to try to spend the day without telling one lie. These determinations made him feel almost virtuous, and he dressed with the impression that God must already be pleased with him. As the father and son sat together at their breakfast, Douglas said, "Father, even though I am your son and I must live with you, I do want to go to see my brother David. May I go some day? Will you take me some day?"

Maddon was beginning at once the usual story he had invented about Malcombe, namely, that he had utterly forgotten Douglas and would not like *to see him*, when suddenly he remembered that it

was a lie. The glib words faltered on his lips, and he said, "Some day," in a vague manner. Soon after he went out. His reward for taking care of his own son, his reward for having stolen his own, to bring him up in poverty and evil, had been one thousand pounds. But Janet had been too clever to let him have all of this sum at once. On the day he took Douglas away she gave him three hundred pounds. In six months he was to have another three hundred pounds. The remaining four hundred pounds was not to be paid until Douglas was with him for a year, and then only on condition that he went to America, taking the boy with him. Maddon had not liked Janet's terms, but he had come to them because he was almost a beggar, and she would make no others. As to the clause about America, he intended to promise fast enough, but had no idea of performing. Now, as he walked down towards the more respectable parts of the town, he thought not only of the dreadful night he had just gone through, but also more pleasingly of his near approaching interview with Janet Fairleigh. The time had almost come when he could claim his second instalment at her hands. He needed this money, for the first three hundred pounds had already disappeared in drink and play. He began to think of some virtuous plan for spending his next money. He thought he might stock a small shop, and live there comfortably with Douglas. Then he remembered that he must hide Douglas if he wished to receive the four hundred pounds which would be his at the expiration of the first year.

He thought this restriction very hard, for was not the child his own son? Was he not bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh? And could any one come between father and son? Not that he loved him, not that he had any feeling of fatherly affection to the child; on the whole, he felt him a burden. He neither understood nor liked him, and but for the golden consideration Douglas might have lived and died unknown and unsought for by him. More than ever since last night did he fear and dread him. Still he knew he must put up with this thorn in his golden rose.

As he strolled up Cheapside he saw coming to meet him a couple whose outlines were familiar. The woman at least he knew, and he had a dim idea that he had seen the man before. The woman was the most important woman in the world to him just then—Janet Farleigh. She was coming towards him with a face like the sunshine. Smiles wreathed her lips; her happy eyes glanced each moment at her companion. Maddon, vaguely remembering Malcombe, did not yet know that it was he, but he had no idea of letting Janet pass without addressing her.

“Beg your pardon, Miss,” he said, touching his hat, “but as we have to meet, might I ask if next Monday at eleven would be convenient for me to call?”

The shock of his words and appearance made Janet turn both white and sick. She summoned up, however, sufficient self-control to say, after *one gasp* for breath, “Oh, is that you? No; I

shall be engaged at eleven on Monday. Come at twelve."

She hurried on.

"Who is the man?" asked Malcombe, surprised at her manner, which had appeared to him chuff and rude.

"He is a man whom I help now and then," said Janet. "I met him first at Paddington; he was a railway porter then; he got out of employment. He helped me once to get home through a dreadful fog, so I have tried to take a little interest in him, and now and then I give him money."

"I don't like his face," continued Malcombe, "and, what is more, I feel sure I have seen it before. Do you know his name, Janet?"

"His name?" said Janet, "his name is Jones."

She hated herself for telling this lie.

"Jones!" answered Malcombe, "well, I don't like him; I would not encourage such a man about Mrs. Byng's, Janet. You are quite right to try to help him, but I think it would be better to send him to me. I shall soon find out if he is really deserving, or, what I fear by his appearance, a worthless impostor. It is strange, but I certainly have seen him before."

Meanwhile Maddon, after watching the couple out of sight, slowly resumed his walk. Janet's manner to him had made him feel very angry.

"I have helped her a deal," he said to himself. "I have helped her more than she helps me, and she has no right to treat me like so much dirt. She was sweet enough when she wanted to give me Douglas. Yes," he continued, "I see her game

fast enough. That big fellow, I know now who he is ; he's my stepson David Malcombe. Old he does look with his gray beard ; but I never could forget his eyes, they are as fierce as ever. A disagreeable boy was David Malcombe, and I don't doubt that he's worse as a man. So my young lady is sweet on him ; I see that easy enough. Well, she'd better be civil to me, or I won't let things go so smooth with her. 'Tis a lucky thing I met them, as it puts another thread into my hands."

Maddon was highly pleased with himself, if angry with Janet. His satisfaction with what he considered his own sharpness made him utterly forget his fears of last night. By this time he was thirsty, and he turned into his accustomed public-house to take his accustomed morning dram, and when the waiter served him he told him his accustomed lie. This was done from the sheer force of habit, as the truth would have been both easier and more probable.





CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ENGAGEMENT.

AT last, then, Janet was engaged to David Malcombe; engaged, and about very shortly to be married. This latter fact was partly owing to Mrs. Byng's kind interference. When Janet, blushing and trembling, had told her of her engagement, the good woman had fairly cried for pleasure.

"My dear," she said, kissing the agitated girl, "I saw what was coming, all along. I knew perfectly you two liked each other. I am very happy in your happiness. You are marrying a good man, Miss Fairleigh, and I think you are going to be a good wife. You have been faithful in a lesser charge, my dear; so I do not fear for you in a greater. And now, when is it to be?"

"Not quite yet," answered Janet. "We are poor."

"But I don't approve of long engagements, and you two have had enough unhappiness as it is. Yes! yes, my dear! you need not try to conceal from me that you were unhappy about this matter for some time. No! you must not wait long. Besides, if ever a man wanted a wife, poor Mr.

Malcombe does. Since the dear little boy has disappeared so mysteriously he has looked—well, so neglected, neglected and ill. I don't know what help the child could have been to him, but it is a fact that his loss has made a sad change in him. I was shocked when I saw him last. Now, why can't you marry at once?"

"As I said, we are poor," replied Janet.

"But cannot your father and mother help?"

"When they die I shall have some money, but I do not like to ask them for anything during their lives."

Janet thought of the thousand pounds she had already obtained.

"Well, well, you know best, though it is not uncommon for parents to dower their daughters. It just remains so, my dear, that if your father and mother can't hasten on your marriage, I must."

"You, Mrs. Byng?"

"Yes, you are not the first girl I have had the privilege of making happy. I cannot make your fortune, of course, but I can smooth the way for you. I give you a hundred pounds a year as Flora's governess. Will you continue to be her governess when you are married?"

"I! how can I, Mrs. Byng?"

"Not her resident governess, but her daily one. The fact is, Mr. Byng and I have taken a fancy to you, and you can manage Flora. Now all the other governesses we had either spoiled her with severity or too much kindness. You have caught the happy medium. She is fond of you, she gets on well *under your care*. We would rather have you as a

daily governess than engage another resident governess. If we can come to terms, of course we should still pay you a hundred a year; will that help your marriage?"

"I believe it will very much," answered Janet, with tears in her eyes.

"Then we will consider it settled; and you must be married from here. Yes, you really must. We will have your father and mother up for the wedding."

With this Mrs. Byng kissed Janet again, who threw herself down on the sofa when she left, and burst into tears.

The next time she saw Malcombe she told him of Mrs. Byng's proposal.

"We can marry at once now, can we not?" she concluded, timidly.

"Yes, I suppose so. This offer of Mrs. Byng's is very kind, and makes our marriage possible. Shall you want a house, Janet? I fear I can scarcely afford one just yet."

"No! I will go to Mrs. Brand's for the present," answered Janet.

Malcombe smiled at this, and kissed her.

"Then we can marry at once," he said.

"And shall it be here, as Mrs. Byng proposes, or in the country, David?"

"I should like it best at the Home Farm, Janet; and I think it would best gratify the old people."

Janet was silent for a moment or two. She was silent, thinking hard. Malcombe saw that her brow was contracted as if in pain.

"What is the matter?" he said.

"Dear!" she replied, "you will think me selfish, strange, and capricious; but the fact is, to be married at the Home Farm would now be painful to me. When you and I were there, David, we were different. Let us have our wedding in London."

"We were different," answered Malcombe, with a sigh. "Perhaps you are right. You will have the old couple up, at least?"

"Yes; Mrs. Byng will invite them, and I shall go home for a fortnight first."

Then it was arranged that they were to be married in May. It was now April, and Janet fixed an early day to go home. Malcombe was very busy at this time; very busy and in better health. He also believed himself to be happy. He had, it is true, rather a dread of analysing his feelings; of comparing old times with present times; but on the whole he felt content. A very calm content it certainly was, but surely it was all right, for was not the joy of his eyes going to be his? Was not the woman he had suffered and longed for about soon to be his very own? He prepared for his future, and thought of it with pleasure and interest. The earthly interest, the personal joy, did his shattered nerves and tired brain good. After all, purely selfish pleasures were nice. He began to plan in the future a little home. Home would indeed be sweet to this man, who had been practically homeless since his early boyhood. True, he felt very quiet with Janet; all the fervour and passion had left him. He saw her with faults; sometimes he owned to seeing faults which pained him, but he

supposed that most men of his age were capable of no strong emotions. His heart did beat at the possibility of some day having a son of his own, and he felt that if ever he could have a son like Douglas, this child might heal a wound which still bled inwardly.

The thought of the son he might one day have excited him far more, and awakened in him far keener pleasure than the present thought of the wife who would be that child's mother.

Alas for poor Janet!





CHAPTER XXV.

THE BEGINNING OF THE BITTER END.

THE old couple welcomed Janet back to Home Farm with open arms. All the faults they had ever dimly brought themselves to believe their daughter to possess had vanished utterly before the joyful fact of her engagement and approaching marriage. Janet was now about to fulfil her womanhood's true mission. She would marry, and might have bairns by-and-by. The old woman bustled about in delightful anticipation; the old man, too, sent for the village lawyer, and made preparations to settle on Janet, on her wedding-day, the sum of three thousand pounds. The interest of this money should be hers from the date of her marriage. As to the thousand pounds he had already given her, he did not even inquire what she had done with it.

One day he walked round the farm with his daughter, and told her what he meant to do.

"Three thousand pounds, father! I did not know you were so rich," she said.

"Aye, aye, lass!" he answered, well pleased, "I told you I had a tidy bit of money put by for you. There will be more when I'm gone, Janey; and a



"Three thousand pounds!" she said to herself.

goodish bit more when the mother and I are put under the sod. I always told you there was no occasion for you to grind in London, daughter."

"And did you always mean to give me three thousand pounds when I was married?" she asked.

"Of course I did. I meant, if you must know, to give you four, but you wanted one. Let that pass; you wanted one thousand for a plan of your own. You are welcome to it all, more than welcome, lass. Aint you our only one?"

Janet did not thank her father; on the contrary, her face grew dark. After a time she told him that she would pay a farewell visit to some neighbours across the fields. He nodded in reply, and turned contentedly home, saying to himself, "She's a fine lass, and a proud one. God bless her. And her step is almost as upright as her mother's used to be."

Then he went back to his old wife, and smoked his pipe contentedly in the chimney corner. As long as her father was in sight Janet walked uprightly, with her head erect. But when she had crossed a stile, and got into a field where no human eye could observe her, her proud demeanour gave way—gave way so utterly that she first stood still, then pressed her hands to her face, then crouched down quite under the thick edge, like a cowed and hunted animal.

"Three thousand pounds!" she said to herself. "Three thousand pounds on my wedding-day, in any case, on my wedding-day! Had I known, had I but known! With three thousand pounds we might have married, and Douglas need not have been

stolen. And I—oh, my God!—I need not have sinned. Oh, my God! I am going to be his wife—going soon to be his wife. But I shall never now be really his—never, never! I am far away from him for ever because of my sin. And I need not have sinned. Oh, had I known! had I known! It is hard, hard!”

She said these words many times, repeating them over and over with a kind of monotonous accent. After a while she began to moan and then to sob; but there were no tears in her sobs. She sat on the low bank, forgetting all about her intended visit, until the sun set and the twilight reminded her that she was far from home. Then she rose to her feet, walked back across the fields slowly and drearily, entering the farm kitchen when it was dark. Her parents inquired about the neighbours she was supposed to have visited. She simply replied that she had changed her mind, and had not gone to see them. They remarked to each other that their Janey looked ill and troubled, but did not venture to question her. It was thus that Janet's true punishment began, and the wages she had sown for she reaped. Hitherto, from the hour of her engagement, she tasted delirious joy. There was no calm in her pleasure, no rest, no assurance of continuance. Still, for the time, it filled both heart and head. She had always known a waking day would come. But she had lived in the present, and said that, for the future, it must bide its time. Its time had come. It came with the knowledge that, had she known a little more, had she even exercised a little patience, had she been

open to her father and mother at the time when Malcombe had first written to her, she might have won her idol and yet not have forsaken her God. That three thousand pounds, which once would have saved two lives, now so useless, weighed with the force of a nightmare on brain and heart.

Her remaining days in the country were very miserable. Its peace and calm were torture to her perturbed and wounded spirit. As she wandered about the fields—for she avoided her father and mother as much as possible—she thought of the days when she was innocent, an innocent girl, light-hearted, fearless. These old memories nearly drove her mad.

One evening, after wandering about all day in her restless fashion, she came suddenly upon a common sight enough—a great bank of starry primroses. She did not know what came over her as she saw the flowers, but she uttered a shrill cry and fled from them in terror. All night long the memory of the pure spring flowers haunted her, and she felt like one in hell.

“I cannot bear much more of this,” she said to herself. “When I see David, his presence may comfort me. I will not stay here until the end of the week. I will go back to London.”

She went downstairs and told her father and mother. They expostulated, but did not insist on keeping her; and by that evening’s train she returned to the Byng’s. It wanted but a fortnight of the wedding, and in ten days they were all to meet in London.



CHAPTER XXVI.

THE GOOD THING WHICH GOD GAVE INSTEAD OF HIMSELF.

IN ten days was to be the wedding, and Mrs. Byng was all bustle and activity. She insisted on giving Janet her wedding-dress. She also declared that that dress should be white. Janet consented to please her kind employer in this particular, but she held out firmly against all bridal finery. She would wear white because she was still young, but she chose a simple material, simply made, and a white straw hat to wear with it. Such an attire would suit her fine figure and striking face well, but Janet had long passed the stage when she could care how she looked, even on her wedding-day. The bustle, however, gave her some relief, and Flora's and Edgar's delight in all that was going on, now and then brought one of her few and rare smiles to her pale face. She saw Malcombe daily. On the first occasion after her return from Home Farm she told him of the unexpected fortune she should bring him on her wedding-day.

"And now we need not live at Mrs. Brand's," she said.

"No, we need not live there now," he answered. "*And yet I shall be sorry to go. I feel that when*

I leave my old quarters I shall lose my last hope of ever finding Douglas."

"Do you still hope to find him?" she asked.

"I know he is dead—he must be dead," replied Malcombe, "but I have never given up hoping against hope."

Janet felt herself growing paler.

"If I could bring him back even yet, even now," she said to herself. "But no, that is impossible! for to have him back now would be to betray my sin, and my sin must never be known."

"I am glad to be able to take you to a more comfortable home," continued Malcombe, after a pause; "we can now have a house. Do you know, Janet, that since my father died I have never had a home. You may judge what a home will feel like to me. And then we shall have money enough to do more good. There is another lad I can take on my list of scholars, and you, dear, might help his sister. They are a pair of orphans; a young pair—fourteen and thirteen—utterly friendless, utterly poor, and yet as well born as I am. These children just work with their hands, and live in an attic together. They are a brave little pair. It will be delightful to give them education every evening. When they are educated we may help them to resume the position they were born to. Yes, Janet; I look forward to much happiness from this money of yours."

Malcombe spoke brightly. Indeed, since his engagement he had brightened more and more, and Janet said to herself that surely, in witnessing his joy, in being a sharer in his good works, the great

torture and unrest caused by her sin might grow less. But it did not. Day after day, as the fine nature of the man to whom she had engaged herself became more apparent, as unconsciously he showed her the unselfishness of his heart, the purity of his soul, her spirit sank and sank.

One day, as they talked together, her fortitude suddenly gave way, and she burst into hysterical weeping.

"What is the matter?" asked Malcombe, tenderly.

"The matter is this," she answered, "that you are near to God and I am not. I can never, never be near to God, and I am miserable without Him."

Malcombe was silent for a moment, much touched.

"You are miserable without Him, Janet," he said then, "but that misery can cease when you will, for He wants you."

"No, not me," she answered.

"Yes, you; are you an exception to the great invitation?"

"Tell me why He wants me," she said, scarcely knowing why she made the request.

"Why He wants you specially? Well, there are many reasons which make the case most clear. First, you are young; He has a special tenderness for the young. Second, you are a woman; He was always very tender to woman. Next, and best of all, He died for you."

Janet still wept on, but more softly. At this moment God, indeed, was near; for to the tempted, suffering woman, at this moment, it appeared *sweeter, better*, to be at peace with Him than to

win Malcombe. He continued to talk to her gently, but she made no further comment, and asked no further question. When he got home that night he prayed long and passionately that she might find God. His whole soul had gone out to her in the tenderest longing. But he little knew, as he prayed, what the answer to this prayer would mean to himself. It meant now, at least, added unhappiness to Janet. So perturbed was her whole nature that more and more, as she met and talked to Malcombe, did she lose her self-control. Two or three days before the wedding-day she said, "May I put a case to you?"

"Certainly, dear," he replied.

"It is a case I have heard about," she continued, colouring. "You say that all can find God. May I tell you about a man whose case seems to me impossible?"

"And I will prove that it is not impossible," said Malcombe.

"This man," continued Janet, speaking slowly, "wanted something badly. He wanted a good thing; the thing he desired was excellent. Could he obtain it his career promised much usefulness and good. But God did not want to give him this thing, and God put an obstacle in the way of his obtaining it. The man was miserable and angry, very angry. More and more, as days went by, he longed for this thing that was denied him, until at last he believed he could not live without it. Suddenly it became plain to him that, by committing a sin, he could obtain the thing he longed for. He struggled for a little bit, but, finally, he yielded.

He committed the sin. Then the thing he longed for was his. He obtained his heart's delight. But he found himself more unhappy than ever, for he found that God, in giving him this good thing, which was so excellent in itself that it must ever remain good, had yet gone away Himself. The man then found that the very goodness of the thing, for which he had previously so loved it, became now his torture; for it was ever reminding him of the God he had lost to win it. Could you say that that man could ever get back God?"

Malcombe was silent for a moment. Janet's story puzzled him, though he saw no connection with himself.

"The goodness of the thing was to be the man's salvation," he said then, "bringing him back at last to the God whom he had forsaken. Your story has a plain solution, Janet. The course for that unhappy man to pursue lies clear. He must give up the thing, good as it is, that God has denied him. He must confess his fault to all whom he has injured; then God will quickly return to the repentant man."

"And suppose he finds this too hard; suppose he never does this?"

"Without repentance there is no remission of sin," answered Malcombe, solemnly.

As Janet hastened home that evening she met a flower-girl with a great basket of primroses. She stopped and bought a large bundle. Up in her own room she wept long over the innocent flowers. Meanwhile Malcombe went on praying for her. He was much distressed by her evident unhappiness.



CHAPTER XXVII.

VICTORY !

WHEN Janet lay down that night she placed the primroses on a table close to her bedside. There was a bright moon, and the moonlight fell full on the little table and the pale flowers. Janet lay with her face turned towards them ; her eyes were wide open. She lay very quiet, for mind and body were exhausted from conflict, but she could not sleep. Once, indeed, in the middle of the night, when the moon had gone down, she dropped off into a troubled doze. She awoke with a cry ; she had lost sight of the flowers, that was her first conscious trouble. Instantly she struck a match and lit her candle. When she saw them again she stretched out her hand and touched them tenderly. "They remind me of hope in winter," she said to herself. Then she lay quiet again, neither sleeping nor moving until morning. But her temporary doze, short as it was, had so far refreshed her as to restore the power of thought. Again the doubts came ; the agonised longings, the wavering desire towards the good, the horror of the bad, to which she felt herself drifting. "Without repentance there is no remission of sin."

Malcombe's words haunted her, but she had ceased to think of them as Malcombe's words; they were now God's. Could she repent? could she give up her idol? Confess her sin, her shameful cruel sin—could she do that which would make the man she so passionately loved hate her, turn from her, from *her* with loathing? No! she could not so repent. No! this chastisement was too mighty; she could never endure it. But, on the other hand, could she stand up in church on the day after to-morrow with this man, and listen in silence to that solemn charge which demanded if there was any reason why she should not be joined to him? For was there not a reason; the simple reason which asks that the holy and the unholy shall not become one? "For what fellowship," said the book which was the book of books to Malcombe, "is there between Christ and Belial? and what fellowship is there between light and darkness?"

"Oh!" she sighed, "if he were not so good, I might have sinned as I have sinned and yet been happy, at least in this world. Now I can never be happy. I sinned—I sinned hard and cruelly to be his wife; but dearly as I love him I feel now that as his wife I shall go mad."

With the early morning she arose softly and dressed herself. She finished her simple toilet by placing a great bunch of the primroses in her dress; then she stole downstairs and went out. They were a late household at the Byng's. No one saw her or heard her as she unfastened the front door and let herself into the street. As she walked down the

street a neighbouring clock struck seven. When she heard the sound she quickened her steps, walking evidently now with a purpose. At ten minutes past seven she entered the church which she used to frequent for the purpose of seeing Malcombe; she went into one of the free seats, and simply waited. She had not come to church to pray, and when she sat down she offered up no prayer of supplication. She was not indifferent to prayer, however, now, as formerly. She longed mightily for the freedom to pray, but she dared not approach God, for the simple reason that she was not prepared to follow out the only advice He would give her.

Just as the morning service commenced Malcombe entered the church. Janet was not prepared for this, and she found herself trembling; he saw her at once, and came into the seat. The service went on, and Janet watched Malcombe joining with his whole heart in the prayers, responding in the psalms and thanksgivings with a look on his face which almost said how closely he and his Maker held intercourse. Janet, watching him, wondered how, Sunday after Sunday, for all the rest of their lives, she could endure beholding him within the sanctuary while she was shut out; every Sunday, every day to watch him praying while she was prayerless. Just as the clergyman, at the end of the short service, turned round to give the final blessing, Malcombe bent towards Janet and said, "Pray!"

His words came with a great power. She bent her head on her hands and whispered, "God, help me." Instantly, the very moment the words had

passed her lips, she felt that some terrible cloud was lifted, and she saw dimly and very far off the possible Light. She touched softly the flowers which lay living and fragrant at her bosom.

"God made them, and they are mine," she thought. Then she left the church with Malcombe.

He walked part of the way home with her. They entered the square where Mr. Byng lived. The garden in the middle of the square was open.

"Let us go in," said Janet. They entered. In the garden they were quite alone.

Malcombe drew Janet's hand through his arm.

"You are very dear to me, my love," he said tenderly.

She felt herself flushing at his words. For, since their engagement, he had used few words of affection. He saw her agitation; but every mark of feeling on her part but awakened his sympathy, and he felt that he was fast returning to his first love for her.

"And now we shall not meet until our wedding-day," he said.

"No," she answered, "this is good-bye."

"Until the day after to-morrow, Janet."

She made no answer to this, but, as they approached the side of the garden close to the Byng's house, she paused.

"David, we are quite alone. Will you give me a kiss?"

Instantly he put his arms round her, and she laid her head on his breast. "This is good-bye," she said, then; and she left him, going towards *the house* without once looking back.

After the school-room breakfast Mrs. Byng had many things to suggest, but Janet stopped her with a plan of her own.

"There will be time enough for the preparations this evening, please," she said, "for now some necessary business takes me out." Before she left the house she kissed Edgar and Flora. They thought she looked strange, but suspected nothing. She also went to Mrs. Byng, and thanked her for all her kindness.

"Dear, you look pale and agitated," replied that kind-hearted lady. "I shall really be glad when this time of suspense is over."

Then Janet found herself once more that day in the street. She walked to the corner of the square and called a hansom cab. As she got into it, and gave a hurried direction, she drew a thick veil over her face. She took a long drive through Oxford Street, Holborn, Cheapside, past the noisy bustling City, into places as bustling, as noisy, but the noise and the bustle were different—caused by a different sound, sprung from a different root. Right through the worst parts of the East End she drove, looking neither to right nor left, until at last, after many inquiries on the part of her driver, she found herself at her destination.

"Wait for me," she said to the man. Then she mounted the stairs of a tumble-down and wretched house. Men and women—evil men and women—saw the young lady as she passed. But the young lady noticed none of them. Her address led her higher and higher. At last she paused before an attic-door, and knocked.

A child's voice from within said, "Who's there?" in a frightened tone.

Janet lifted the latch and went in. A child, dressed in rags, rose up from a couch on the floor, where he had thrown himself, and gazed at her with dark, terrified eyes.

"Are you Douglas Malcombe?" she said.

The child sprang forward at the sound. "Yes, yes!" he said. "But how do you know my name? I'm not called Malcombe here, I'm called Maddon. Have you come with news? Has my father gone to hell yet?"

"No, no, child!" answered Janet, aghast at the creature who spoke and the words he said. "What do you mean? I don't bring you such news."

"He's going," replied the boy. "He's going as hard as ever he can. I can't save him; I have tried, but I can't. He's going, he may be there any day now." Here he threw himself back on his ragged couch and burst into tears.

Janet raised her veil. She went up to the boy and touched him softly.

"Douglas," she said, "look at me; have you ever seen me before?" He glanced at her, but shook his head without the smallest recognition.

"You remember your brother David?" she said, then.

There was an instant change. The boy came up to her and spoke, trembling.

"My brother David! Do I remember my brother David? How can you ask? My father says he has forgotten me; that he does not love me. But the thought of my brother David is breaking my heart."

“He has not forgotten you, Douglas.”

“Oh! are you sure? Where is he? Take me to him. Oh! please, please take me to him.”

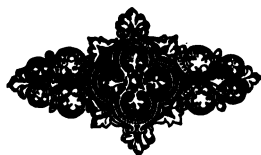
“I cannot do that, but you shall see him to-night. He will come himself and fetch you to-night.”

“Will he really? I can scarcely believe it. But there is no use, my father won’t let me go to him.”

“Yes, he will; when your father returns, give him this envelope. Keep it very carefully, and give it to him without allowing any one to open it. When your father sees it he will let you go to your brother.”

She placed a sealed envelope in Douglas’s hand, and went away before the child could reply. The cab still waited for her; she got into it, gave the driver a direction to a West End stationer’s. There she asked for materials for writing a letter; sat down by a table and wrote quickly and without hesitation. The letter was dropped into the next pillar-box, and then she called a fresh cab and drove to Paddington.

An hour later Janet Fairleigh was on her way back to Home Farm.





CHAPTER XXVIII.

MALCOMBE'S GREAT TRIAL.

MALCOMBE, in preparation for the first real holiday of his life, had spent an unusually busy day. Unselfish ever, he had tried to arrange as far as possible for the comfort of the many in whom he was interested during his absence. He was also making a plan by which, even when living away from her, he might still benefit and still retain his hold of Mrs. Brand. He had proposed that the orphan brother and sister, whom he and Janet were to educate, should occupy his vacant rooms. Mrs. Brand would be kind to these children, and he, in visiting them, would still see his old landlady. But now his preparations were nearly complete, and he returned to his solitary lodgings to spend the first of his two last solitary evenings. He lit his reading-lamp, threw himself on the old sofa where Graham and he had so often sat and chatted, and took up a book which was interesting him. He found, however, that he could not read. A great change was impending. It occupied thought to the exclusion of all else. He closed the book and sat back conjuring up pleasant pictures. He, a lonely man, would the day after

to-morrow have a wife. He, a homeless man, would have a home. He found that the words "wife" and "home" signified as much to him as to another; as completely as to another did they fill his heart. He had shut them away from him resolutely for many years. Now they had come to him; they were to be his own. All the undefined dissatisfaction he had felt towards Janet in the early days of their engagement had vanished. The very earnestness which the consciousness of her trouble had awakened in her face and eyes had restored her to almost her first place in his heart. A cold, serene, indifferent wife he could not have endured. But this woman!—so full of susceptibility, with her sometimes almost too passionate words—this woman! who suffered without him, and even now that she had won him could be miserable in his presence, because the presence of One higher than he was not fully realised by her—this woman, who for a short time he owned he had failed to understand, and so failing had almost ceased to love—he could love now, he could even venerate. He pictured himself in all tenderness leading her into paths of peace, making up to her by his devotion for the injury he, pursuing what he held to be the path of duty, had yet for a time inflicted on her. In short, Malcombe pictured to himself a very happy future. But it is often, most often in our moments of greatest bliss, that we feel insecure. Sitting by his fireside, looking at the happiness that lay before him, Malcombe became suddenly conscious of a strange sensation—a sensation both physical and mental. The

physical part affected his heart peculiarly. He felt cold, faint; the full healthy pulse beat languidly. Accompanying this came a mental fear which amounted to agony. He became oppressed with a dread, a dread he knew not of what—not death, not pain, something worse, because intangible. So vivid and yet so unreal was the feeling that he rose hastily from his seat, walked twice up and down the room, and finally went to his bookcase for the purpose of selecting some book from thence which would be sufficiently interesting to fix and divert his attention.

At this instant the postman's knock was heard below; a moment later Mrs. Brand's youngest child brought him up a letter. He smiled when he saw the handwriting. "*This* book I can read," he said to himself; and he sat down once more on the old sofa and opened the letter. The following words lay before him :—

David,

When you kissed me this morning—when this morning you put your arms round me, and I laid my head on your breast, you bade me good-bye. You did not know it, my love—my dear, dear love—but I did. I knew that I was giving you up, just as surely as you will give me up when you read this letter. Please, David, do one thing now: put down the letter, when you have read so far, and think of me tenderly once again; and just once, before you finish the letter, ask God to bless me, for though you curse afterwards, yet I believe now that He will bless.

Here there was a pause in the writing, and Malcombe had to turn the page to go on.

You are prepared a little bit now, so I will tell you the truth *as quickly as possible*. David, you must have sometimes

wondered lately what ailed me, why I cried and seemed so miserable. It was just this: your kindness, your goodness were driving me mad. Had you been a less good man we might have lived happily together, we might have been married the day after to-morrow and enjoyed a long life together. By-and-by I should have lost my soul as the forfeit. But no matter! we should have been happy down here. What I staked so high for, I should have won. With you, however, this was impossible; your goodness, as I said, was driving me mad. I know now that it was to be my tempted, sinful soul's salvation. David, do you remember my telling you about a man who wanted a great good, and to win it he committed a terrible wrong? It was not a man, but a woman. I am that woman! Your advice to that woman was, "Give up the good thing, which to you is sinful; repair, if possible, the wrong committed, and God will return." I asked you, oh, how despairingly! "Is there no other course?" and you answered, "Without repentance there is no remission of sin." David, your words have conquered; or, rather, God has conquered through your words. I resign the good, good thing. I give you up, David; and I repair, as far as now in me lies, the terrible wrong I have committed. I restore to you Douglas. Ah! now I see you start and look horrified! I do not wonder. David, I stole Douglas. I got him taken from you, because I thought that when he was gone you would be able to marry me. Quite by accident I met Douglas's father: he was the man you and I saw together that day in Cheapside. I found out, no matter how, near the relationship he bore to the boy, and I bribed him largely to remove him. David, your brother is still alive. I saw him a few moments ago. I told him that you would seek him out to-night. He is thin and in rags; he looks worn and injured. His address you will find below. You will have no difficulty in getting him back, for I have left a letter with him to give to his wretched father; that letter will make the father only too glad to restore him to you. The address where you will find him will horrify you, but not more than any other part of this terrible letter. David, that is all! I do not say a word to excuse myself. I know

Douglas ; he had really forgotten him until now. He took up the letter to read the address ; took out his pocket-book to write it down. Then he burned the letter in the flame of the solitary candle.

It was now past midnight. But so much the better ; he wanted no one who knew him to see him to-night. He could fetch Douglas back without even Mrs. Brand being any the wiser until the morning. He went downstairs and let himself out. It was a long way off this address, but he chose to walk, for rapid action was the only course possible to him just then. But as he walked he looked like a man in a dream, like a man who was seeing nothing of external things ; all his vision was inward, and the inward view was terrible. It took him over an hour to walk to the address Janet had given him. At last he found it ; he entered the low court and stopped at the right number.

“Does a man of the name of Maddon live here with a little boy ?” he asked of a woman who leant against the door-post. She nodded an affirmative answer, adding something impertinent to give force to her words. Malcombe, however, neither heard nor heeded. He entered the house and began to ascend the stairs. On the second landing two men fought furiously. They stood opposite to each other, aiming blow after blow each at the face of the other. A little girl stood by weeping and wringing her hands. When she saw Malcombe she sprang to meet him, took his hand, and said excitedly, “Oh ! please part ’em ! Please make

'em stop ! They have been and beat mother, and now they 'll kill each other."

At the sound of the weeping, pleading voice of the child, Malcombe paused. He put his hand up to his eyes ; a mist seemed to roll away, and the old chivalrous and noble nature awoke. Instantly he stepped between the two men, making a shield of his own body for the protection of each. They were blindly drunk, and furious at the interference. Each aimed a savage blow, one front, one back. The two blows came with the weight of a sledge hammer on Malcombe's heart. The agony was indescribable. It took his breath away. He turned sick and dizzy, and fell against the wall. The men took no further notice of him, but resumed their interrupted fighting. The little girl approached. Malcombe motioned for a glass of water. She brought him some in a broken cup. In a few moments he felt better and went up the remaining stairs to Maddon's room. Douglas alone was there. He welcomed his brother with almost incoherent joy. His father, after receiving the letter, had gone away. Douglas was free to return. Malcombe took his hand and led him downstairs. In the street they took the first cab they could find ; and so returned to Mrs. Brand's.





CHAPTER XXIX.

THE DREAM.

ALL the way home Malcombe never spoke, but Douglas, leaning his head on his brother's shoulder, felt too happy, too completely at rest to need words; indeed, words would have been too much for him just yet. When they reached the house Malcombe gave him a cup of milk and some bread; then he took him up to the old bedroom, and laid him between the blankets, and kissed him.

"Brother," said Douglas, raising his thin face.

"Little brother," answered Malcombe, very tenderly. Then he kissed him again, and went downstairs. By this time the fierceness of his first passion had spent itself, and he felt only intense weariness and a longing desire to sleep. He lay down on the old sofa, threw a railway rug about him, and in a moment was wrapped in profound slumber.

When he awoke Mrs. Brand and Douglas were both bending over him. Mrs. Brand and Douglas and both been crying, and now she stood close to Malcombe clasping the child in her arms.

"Eh, dear heart, sir!" she exclaimed, as Mal-

combe opened his eyes, contracting his brows with the first sharpness of the return of his pain. "This is strange tidings. But, God help us! you do look bad, sir; why, you've gone all gray! I hope to goodness as nothing wrong 'as happened, sir?"

"Yes, Mrs. Brand," answered Malcombe, "something very wrong has happened. You shall know sometime, perhaps to-night or to-morrow morning. In the meantime I want to be alone. I will have Douglas with me, but no one else. You see, Mrs. Brand, we have got back our little boy. Will you kindly see that no one disturbs us? I cannot see any one on any pretext to-day; so let me be alone. You can send up all that is necessary."

Mrs. Brand promised, and, burning with curiosity but also full of compassion, went away.

"You shall sit by me, Douglas, and read, if you will; but I am not quite well. I cannot talk to you, at least for the present."

Douglas smiled, went straight to that corner of the bookcase where of old his favourite books had lain, took down the "Arabian Nights," and returned to a low stool at Malcombe's feet.

"I'm too happy to care to talk," he said then. "I'm the veriest most happy boy in the world."

"I am glad of that, my dear lad; and now I think I will turn my back on you and try to sleep a little longer. I am most unaccountably drowsy."

But this second sleep was not sound and refreshing like the first. It was broken by bad dreams, and at noon Malcombe got up. He had eaten nothing since he had opened Janet's letter. Now he poured himself out a glass of wine, took a few sips, and ate

half a biscuit, but the effort made him feel sick. His head was also dizzy. He found it difficult to remember what was troubling him ; he knew there was something, but his efforts to grasp the tangled threads of his sorrow became almost impossible. The numbness and coldness too about his heart were very manifest, but this feeling he attributed to the cruel blow he had received last night. He sat down in his old worn arm-chair and looked at Douglas, wondering dimly how Douglas was associated with some great trouble which weighed upon him. Of Janet herself he scarcely thought. At last, still sitting in his arm-chair, he fell again into uneasy slumber. This last slumber was long, and when he awoke from it, it was evening. The cloud had now quite passed from his brain. He could think vividly, and with all his usual power.

"David," said Douglas, who was moving uneasily about, "you don't look at all well?"

"I don't feel quite the thing my boy, but to-morrow I hope to be all right. I shall just keep quiet to-day. My dear lad, you are very pale yourself; will you go to bed?"

"I should like to sleep, David, if I may lie down here with you. May I bring down some pillows and lie on the floor?"

"No! you shall get on the sofa. Lie down now, and I will cover you up." Douglas obeyed, and in a few moments the weary child was in happy dreams.

It was now Malcombe's turn to sit and watch. All the full power of thought was his again. He *knew what* Janet had done. He knew what he had

felt about her last night. He knew that all was over between them. He knew that his last chance of a home on earth was over. But though he knew it all now again, knew it and realised it fully, yet it had not returned on him with the agony of last night. He no longer rebelled against God, nor did he curse Janet. After a time he ceased to think of her, and his thoughts flew back to the one true friend of his life—the young Anglican priest, who in dying had surely let some of his mantle fall on him. Thinking thus the drowsiness again returned, and he slept. In this sleep he dreamt of Graham. He thought Graham came into his room, and taking his hand, spoke in his old impulsive way, "There is something to be done, Malcombe, and at once. Come with me."

As of old they went out together. They went through court after court, alley after alley, never stopping, never pausing, until at last all the wretchedness seemed to end and the harsh loud voices of sin and misery to cease. And they found themselves in the country, in the midst of spring, radiance, and beauty. They entered a field where a chariot awaited them. To Malcombe's dream eyes it looked misty and indistinct. But Graham got into it and motioned to him to follow. Instantly the chariot began to rise; higher and higher through the air it carried them. Malcombe had a sensation of being half-choked, of gasping for breath as they rushed through the air. But at last they reached a place where the chariot rested, and Graham, covering his face, dismounted. Malcombe, still following his friend, did likewise.

Then, out of a glory too bright to gaze at, they heard the voice of God. Malcombe knew it was the voice of God, and listened with a wondering awe.

"My workmen," said the mighty voice of God, "You have come to Me, one of you rendered perfect by suffering, the other"—there was a pause, and when the voice sounded again out of the excellent glory it was low, and its reproach thrilled through the heart of Malcombe—"the other, unwittingly, has failed in one grand duty; but there is room for repentance. Repent, My workman, while there is time, for I need you. I need you both; one up here, one down on earth, to help to build up My living temple. Repent! for the work is great."

Hearing these words Malcombe awoke. It was now past midnight. A change had come over him in his sleep; the weight over his heart was gone. He felt active and well once more, and yet strangely peaceful.

"Repent!" he said to himself; "that was a strange dream. Repent! Yes, I must forgive her who has injured me. I will forgive her. I can never see her again, but I will forgive her. I will write to her, and now."

But though he said this he did not stir, but still sat with his hands folded before him. The inclination to write to Janet was not strong, nor was the sense of forgiveness vivid. He would put off this task of writing to her, who had so sinned against him and his, until the morning. Still his dream was with him, and restlessness began again

to take the place of peace. Douglas stirred in his sleep, sat up on the sofa, and looked at his brother.

"David, won't you eat something now?"

"No, no lad. I could not; I am not hungry."

Douglas got off the sofa and went close to the fire.

"Read something to me," said Malcombe.

"Indeed I will. Out of what book?"

"The Bible. Stay, I will fetch it for you."

"What part shall I read?" asked the child.

"Choose," answered the man.

Douglas turned the pages, then read solemnly:

"And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly."

Malcombe held up his hand to stop him.

"Thank you, my lad, that is enough."

"What does it mean, brother?"

"It means the ceasing from evil, and the following perfect good."





CHAPTER XXX.

AND ITS RESULTS.

ALL that night, through his troubled dreams, through his waking moments, Malcombe was haunted by the voice which had been the voice of God in his dream.

"You have failed in one grand duty—repent."

He failed to see what this meant. He was puzzled, and his night was truly a weariness to him. Early in the morning he was awakened by Douglas.

"David! there is a man downstairs—an old man. He seems in great trouble, and he wants to see you at once."

Wondering, Malcombe went downstairs. In his sitting-room stood old Mr. Fairleigh. He had uncovered his white head, and came to meet Malcombe with trembling outstretched hands.

"We know all, sir, me and my old woman. Janey came to us and told us all. We are sore and troubled for our lass, and I come up to Lunnon to see if it couldn't be mended for our poor gel."

"How is Janet?" asked Malcombe.

"How is she, sir? how is the dead? She's gentle enough, but so is the dead. Never a word

from her—only jest telling all the truth. ‘I have om e home at last, father and mother,’ she said. ‘I have sinned, and I have come home. You’ll take me in, even though I have sinned.’ Her mother were fit to break her heart, crying. But Janey, she didn’t cry, only sat down by the fire, and didn’t eat, though we coaxed her. She’s like a lamb: her that wor so spirited. And the mother says to me yesterday: ‘Danel, ef I wor you I’d go up to Lunnon and see Mr. Malcombe, and put the rights o’ the case to him.’ And when no letter come all day yesterday—though her mother and me we kept a messenger constant in the next town a-purpose—I made bold to come up last night.”

“I could not write yesterday,” said Malcombe, “but I will to-day. I will send back a letter by you.”

“And ef I may take a liberty, sir, what ’ull you say to my gel? what bit o’ comfort shall I take back to her?”

Malcombe was silent for a moment or two. Then he said slowly, “The letter must be to herself; but I do not mind your knowing its purport. I will forgive her. I thought hardly of her; but I do not now. I forgive her freely, as I hope myself to be forgiven.”

“I’m glad as you can say that much, sir. You forgives her, as you hopes to be forgive. My Janey sinned a good bit. You forgives her, as she forgives you, most willing.”

“As she forgives me,” said Malcombe; “what do you mean?”

"I mean this, Mr. Malcombe," said old Fairleigh, suddenly changing his tone, drawing himself up and looking fixedly at the younger man, "as you, too, have sinned. You have sinned bitter, and drawn my gel into all as she did of mighty wrong."

"What do you mean?" asked Malcombe again.

"I means this, sir—as you had no right to win my gel's heart and then to give her hup. Yes; I say as you had no right to act so. You know you won her heart, and you know you loved her. And it wor a match as her mother and me liked, and would have said 'God bless you both' to. And you writ to her to say as you would give her up."

"I did. I gave her up in agony of heart, in pain unutterable; because a sterner duty was laid on me which I dared not neglect."

"Not a bit of it, sir, begging of your pardon. You had no stronger duty than to be true to the young woman whose love you had won. I'm a poor man in the way of eddication, and I never said as I'd do good to others as you do good, sir—God bless you for that same—but for all that I'd sooner have cut off my hand than treated Peggie as shameful as you treated my gel. You should have writ to her, sir, and said, 'I have got an orphin-boy as I must keep. I am too poor to marry yet awhile, but I love you faithful, and I can't and won't give you up. And when I have worked hard enough, and have money enough, I will come for you ef you will be faithful to me and be my wife.' Don't you think, sir, as Janey would have waited for you twenty years, wor the need so to do?"

"I understand you," said Malcombe.

White as death he leant against the wall. Was this old man coming to him really speaking in the voice of God? Was this his dream? his dream put into living words? words spoken by a living and suffering old man.

"You have failed in one great duty—repent."

"I understand you," he said again, feebly. "You have opened my eyes. God knows why I gave her up. God knows how I suffered, how I longed for her. As I would cleave to a religion so did I cleave to what I thought was right in this matter."

"We know it, sir. We don't blame you for what you thought was right to do. Only now you can repent."

"So I do; God knows how intensely. Yes; truly I have sinned, but I did not know it."

"You both have sinned, Mr. Malcombe, sir; both you and my gel. The woman being the weakest fell the lowest. But there is repentance and forgiveness with the Almighty for you both. You will send a message to my Janey as you forgives her her bitter sin."

"Yes, yes; I meant to write to her even before you came. I forgive her, God knows. But now that I see what I have done I cannot forgive myself."

"Tell my gel that, sir, and it 'll comfort her a deal. I will stay, ef you will let me, for the letter, and bring it back with me."

"No! I cannot write. I will come."



CHAPTER XXXI.

THE END CAN MAKE UP FOR ALL.

THAT very afternoon, at Home Farm, Janet and Malcombe met again. They met something as those must meet whom for a short time death has divided. No one knew what they said to one another ; no one in this world ever heard.

By the last train that night Malcombe returned to London. Lost in the great city was the man. Lost in the quiet country home was the woman. Lost, that is, as far as outward eyes could see to one another. They never wrote, never met, never spoke either of the other. There can be, however, an unseen influence without either words or letters, and there is little doubt that this golden thread united them.

Thus the time went by. The time went by without event of special interest to either, until at last, on a summer's afternoon, an old couple, hand in hand, telling no one of their mission or their purpose, left Home Farm and went up to London. There they found out Malcombe. There they unfolded their plans and spoke their minds. That journey led to results.

Those results made bells chime joyfully in a

little country church on a summer's morning, and the simple congregation saw two people, a man and a woman, stand together before God and clasp hands, and so become one in life, as they had long and fully been in heart.

That is all. The old couple at Home Farm have adopted Douglas; have undertaken to provide for him and pay all the expenses of the excellent University education he is receiving. He spends much of his time with them, and the old man calls him Benjamin, for is he not the son of his old age?

In the great world of London, two dwell in a tent which yet is a home, for it has its foundation in heaven; and two work hard to help to build up that living temple which is the eternal work of all God's people.

THE END.

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